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DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

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# DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

## A RECORD AND A STUDY

BY

WILLIAM SHARP

'This soul's labour shall be scann'd  
And found good.'—*Wellington's Funeral*.

D. G. ROSSETTI.

London

MACMILLAN AND CO.

1882

*For the right to engrave the design that forms the Frontispiece,  
the Author is indebted to the kindness of Mrs. Gabriele Rossetti and  
Miss Christina Rossetti.*

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## CHAPTER I.

### LIFE.

AT rare intervals in the records of memorable lives we come across the names of men who seem to have been gifted with an almost too disproportionate amount of talent in whatsoever they laid their hands to, men who, like Lionardo da Vinci, take a foremost place amongst their contemporaries, and to whom painting, poetry, literature, or science seem equally familiar. It is very often supposed that diversity of gifts means mediocrity in all, but a glance at the histories of many well-known lives tends to disprove any such supposition, while on the other hand it may be admitted that multiplicity of talents has too often militated against the due fulfilment of some special bent. Lionardo, one of the most powerful and subtle intellects as well as one of the greatest painters of his time, is an example of one so gifted and at the same time so restrained by temperament and varied interests as never to reach the supreme position in art he *might* have attained. We know that Michel Angelo was a painter, a sculptor, an architect, and a poet; that Raffaele's spirit found other than merely pictorial expression; that Dante was an artist as well as the author of an immortal epic; but we never hesitate in deciding the first to

be less great in verse than in the plastic arts, the second to be a painter above all else,—though indeed of this we can hardly judge, considering that the often-referred-to sonnets “dinted with a silver pencil, such as else had drawn madonnas,” have not come down to us,—or in recognising the author of *The Divine Comedy* as less excellent with his brush than his pen. But certainly in this century the number of diversely-gifted men of genius amongst our countrymen alone has been remarkable, and amongst those still with us such instances may be mentioned as William Morris, poet and artist; Mr. Woolner, at once sculptor and poet; Sir Noel Paton, at once painter, sculptor, and poet; and William Bell Scott, an accomplished art-critic and painter as well as poet;—but in each of these instances there is more or less little cause to hesitate as to wherein each is specially and decisively notable. But in the case of the subject of this record it is not so,—or, at any rate, no absolute decision can be given that will meet with almost universal acceptance. Great in both the great arts of Poetry and Painting, Dante Gabriel Rossetti held and will continue to hold a unique position. Those whose attention is specially given to literature regard him as one of the truest and most remarkable poets of his time, and grèater by virtue of his poetic than his artistic powers: while those, on the other hand, whose studies or tastes concern the art of painting consider him even greater as an artist than as a poet. Nor can his own opinion be taken as decisive, for genius is often blind as to its own products and without the sure and careful judgment of later minds; but after all the discussion is immaterial, leading to no good end, for

the supreme facts still remain that literature and art have both been enriched with the creations of a master. An acknowledged leader in both, Rossetti attained a position amongst English poets and amongst English artists that will appear more remarkable as it will gain more general recognition in days to come. His recent death is a loss greater than is at present realised, except by a comparative few: and to those who had the great privilege of his friendship it is a sorrow far beyond the ordinary expressions of regret. A lofty spirit, a subtle and beautiful intellect, a poet and artist such as the world does not often see, a generous critic, and a helpful friend, the man who so lately passed away from our midst will not readily be forgotten.

Dante Rossetti, however, is not the only member of the family bearing the same name who has achieved wide and well-merited distinction: the name of his father, for one, being perhaps as well known in Italy as the poet-artist's in England and America.

At Vasto, situated amongst the mountainous regions of the Abruzzi, Gabriele Rossetti was born on March 1, 1783; and now that remote little town remembers with grateful affection one who took part in the national struggle, and whose patriotic poems encouraged and kept alive the popular emotion whose pulse was Freedom. Some thirty-five years ago a medal was struck in his honour, and there has lately been a successful movement to erect a statue to his memory in the chief piazza of Vasto, which also, by-the-bye, bears the name of the poet-patriot. The story of the participation of Gabriele Rossetti in the constitutional struggle with King Ferdinand and of his escape after



his proscription has been frequently told since the death of his son, so that only a brief recapitulation is now necessary. He was one of the small band of patriotic Neapolitans who extorted by their determined persistence a fairly satisfactory constitution from King Ferdinand, who, having first left Naples under cover of a lie, treacherously returned with an Austrian army, and ere long stamped his foot upon the newly-gained constitution and proscribed those concerned in the forcible formation thereof. Gabriele Rossetti was in especial disfavour and eagerly sought after by the Austrian soldiery and mercenary police, for not only had he been one of the most urgent in his claims for an honourable constitution but also his songs and patriotic hymns had taken root in the hearts and expression upon the lips of the excitable populace; and it would indeed in all probability have gone badly with him if it had not been for timely and secret foreign intervention. A portion of the English fleet was at the time stationed in the Bay of Naples, the admiral in command being Sir Graham Moore; and it was this gentleman who was instrumental in rescuing the proscribed patriot. Sir Graham had been persuaded to attempt rescuing Rossetti by the solicitations of Lady Moore, who was an ardent admirer of the poet's compositions and political opinions; so one afternoon the admiral and a brother officer, dressed in the uniform that required no other passport, reached the hiding-place of the poet, where they disguised him in a uniform similar to their own, thereafter making their way in a carriage unchallenged till they reached the shore. According to one account, Rossetti was then conveyed on board Sir Graham Moore's own ship

for the night; according to another he was put at once on board a steamer bound for Malta, which place he in any case arrived at ere long. These events took place in 1821, and Rossetti remained in Malta for about four years, finally settling in London early in 1825. His means were at first extremely limited, for his income had hitherto been mainly derived from his position as director at the Museo Borbonico in Naples, a post of course forfeited by his political "misdeemeanours," but in a comparatively short time he found himself able to support a wife whom he chose in the person of Frances Polidori, sister of the Dr. Polidori who travelled with Lord Byron, and daughter of Sgr. Polidori, secretary to Alfieri. Married in 1826, one year after he had settled in London, he in 1831 obtained the post of Professor of Italian Literature at King's College, which he occupied till 1845 when he practically lost his sight, and in consequence resigned the chair; but though partially deprived of the use of his eyes he retained his health for a considerable time, his death not taking place till 1854, the recorded date being the 26th of April. Mrs. Rossetti still lives, beloved by all her friends and looked up to by her surviving family, and to her influence each of her four children owed much more than is recordable. The chief prose productions of Gabriele Rossetti are the *Comento Analitico Sulla Divina Commedia* (published in 1826-7), *Sullo Spirito Anti-papale* (1832), *Il Mistero dell' amor platonico svelato* (1840), and *La Beatrice di Dante* (1852): the drift of the best known of these works being an endeavour to prove that the special poetic vehicle chosen for expression by Dante and his contemporaries was selected as being the most

suitable to veil their aversion to the papacy, while they introduced a "lady of love" (in Dante's case—Beatrice) as the symbol of *true* Christianity and the special object of their love and adoration. The best-known collections of his poetic work are *Dio e l'uomo* (1840), *Il reggente in solitudine* (1846), *Poesie* (1847), and *L'Arpa Evangelica* (1852). Of the four children of this marriage the eldest, Maria Francesca, was born in 1827; the next child was the subject of this memoir; the third, William Michael, was born in 1829, and in December of the following year Christina Georgina. The eldest of these children became soon deeply imbued with the spirit animating the *Divine Comedy*, and, following in the footsteps of her father, wrote an elaborate and interesting commentary or analysis of Dante's great poem, the volume being called *A Shadow of Dante*, and representing, so far as I am aware, the only published matter by Miss Maria Rossetti.<sup>1</sup> In later life she joined a sisterhood attached to the Anglican Church, and died in earnest fulfilment of her self-imposed duties some few years ago. William Michael Rossetti from his earliest youth showed marked critical ability, his essays and reviews in *The Germ* being in every way noticeable as the work of one in his twenty-first year; and not reviews only did he contribute to the famous but short-lived magazine of which he was editor, but also poems marked by a strong and sympathetic love of nature if also by somewhat crude expression. The high rank

<sup>1</sup> That is, *original* matter. Miss Rossetti compiled a useful volume of *Exercises for securing Idiomatic Italian by means of Literal Translation from the English*, and the Key to the same, entitled *Aneddoti Italiani: One Hundred Italian Anecdotes, selected from "Il Compagno del Passeggio Campestre."*

as critic in both literature and art which Mr. W. M. Rossetti has attained is too well known to require further mention here, and the same may be said of Miss Christina Rossetti, who has achieved a fame that no poetess since Mrs. Browning has equalled, and whose lovely lyrics are known to thousands both in England and the Colonies as well as to her large public in the United States. Altogether a family that is unique in the chronicles of Art and Literature, surpassing in variety and importance of gifts even that other famous household who made the name of Brontë so significant to all lovers of literature.

The elder son and second child of Gabriele and Frances Rossetti was born on the 12th of May 1828, and was christened with three names, Gabriel Charles Dante—the first being after his father, the second after Mr. Charles Lyell (father of the well-known Sir Charles Lyell, the geologist), a frequent visitor and friend at 38 Charlotte Street, Portland Place, where Mr. and Mrs. Rossetti had fixed their residence and where their four children were born, while the third name of the future poet-artist was that of the greatest of Italian writers whose influence affected every member of the Rossetti family to a marked degree. The household was indeed such an one that it would have been strange if the children belonging to it had not fostered at least one strongly intellectual life, for not only did both father and mother dwell in an atmosphere of study, poetry, and national aspirations, but also their house was the resort of many who could not fail to leave a more or less definite impress upon sensitive minds however young. I remember having heard that amongst those

visitors was one swarthy Italian republican, with the odour of a political assassination about his name, who possessed both an awe and a fascination for the young Rossettis, especially for the impressible Gabriel, who many years later wrought partly from imagination and partly from memory the tragic dramatic poem *A Last Confession*. It is a fact of great significance that the earliest educational influences upon Dante Gabriel Rossetti were the writings of Dante and Shakespeare, for long before ordinary children reach the point where mere rudimentary instruction is left behind he had made the acquaintance of *Hamlet* in Retzsch's *Outlines*, and was familiar with the sound of the vowelled Italian as written by the great Florentine and often quoted by the child's father. Reference has frequently been made since the poet's death to an early dramatic attempt called *The Slave*, but what the author has himself said frequently in private is doubtless the case, that the production has been absurdly overrated and was marked by nothing that was manifestly other than the efforts of a precocious child. *The Slave*, written at the age of five years, was no "drama," but consisted of some rough passages childishly set down, as was but natural; the characters were two, one called "Slave" and one "Tyrant," and the diction of the "play" was just such as a precocious child would commit to paper. This understood, the significance of the early production can be estimated at its true value, and we can recognise fully the promise embodied in the fact of a child of five years attempting original composition and the intellectual awakening and creative impulse so early manifested. Considerably later, when in his thirteenth or fourteenth year (and not in 1844,

as every obituary and critical notice has stated) Rossetti wrote a poem of a different class from *The Slave* and under other influence than Shakespeare's, but even with the advantage of seven years further maturity the result was boyish to a marked degree and contained little fulfilment of the promise held in the precocity of *The Slave*. The verses, bearing the romantic name of *Sir Hugh the Heron*, have for motto the lines from Scott's *Marmion* (canto i.)—

“Sir Hugh the Heron bold,  
Baron of Twisell and of Ford,  
And Captain of the Hold”—

and, as the title-page informs us, form *A Legendary Tale, in Four Parts, by Gabriel Rossetti Junior*, printed privately by G. Polidori, at his residence near Regent's Park. The verses must be pronounced void of any special merit, a fact the author fully recognised, regretting at the same time that even for limited family circulation they should ever have been printed; comparing them with the other little volume also printed by Mr. Polidori containing the early verses of Miss Christina Rossetti the contrast is very marked, the sister's precocity much excelling that of the brother in regard to *quality* of work at an equally early age.

Before the composition of *Sir Hugh the Heron*, however, the young poet had in his eighth or ninth year been sent to a private school close to his father's house, where throughout the greater part of a year he received some rudimentary instruction from the Rev. Mr. Paul; and in 1835 he was removed to King's College School, where he remained till his fifteenth year and where he acquired the elements of Latin,

French, and German. Greek, I believe, he never learned—certainly not further than the mere rudiments—and Italian was naturally to him almost as familiar as English; but despite this latter fact he rarely, so he told me more than once, used to think in the language of Dante, and only in dreams and then only during the years of youth was Italian the groove for his unconscious mental actions. Before 1843, the date he left King's College School, he had manifested a strong desire to become a painter, and was so persistent in his expressed desire that his parents agreed that as soon as he could leave school he should receive fitting instruction in art; and accordingly, when he had reached his fourteenth year, he was allowed to go to Cary's Art Academy in Bloomsbury, better known as Sass's, where he remained till 1846, when he was admitted to the Royal Academy Antique School. While thus endeavouring to attain the rudiments of an artist's education he was not intellectually idle, but spent his evenings chiefly in reading and translating Italian poetry, in occasional original composition and in German translation. From the last-named language he rendered into English verse a small portion of the *Niebelungen Lied*, a few scenes from *Faust*, and the whole of the *Arme Heinrich* of Hartmann von Aue; but his proficiency in the Teuton tongue was impermanent, and in latter years he could not have accomplished what he did in the way of German translation in his teens. The study and labour entailed was, however, of great advantage to him not only in maturing his own poetic gift, but also in giving him greater intellectual ease and skill in the careful and beautiful translations then begun, and later given to

the reading world as *The Early Italian Poets*, and subsequently as *Dante and His Circle*. During the two years he attended the Antique School and omitted attending the Life School he was a rather desultory student, and in consequence by no means attained proficiency in the important items of drawing and arrangement, an inattention that often subsequently was to cost him deep regret and was the chief cause perhaps of his leading defect as an artist. Immature as in many respects was his earliest work in art, Rossetti had rapidly matured in his poetic gift, and astonished many of his friends by productions markedly original and individual. In his nineteenth year, besides several lyrics with one exception unpublished, he wrote *My Sister's Sleep* and *The Blessèd Damozel*, both, but the latter especially, showing that a new and original poet had found voice—a lyric so strangely beautiful and with touches of such vivid imagination, that while we recall Chatterton with his *Ballad of Charitie* and the late Oliver Madox Brown with his few but memorable compositions, we also recognise an absolute maturity hardly characteristic of the finest work even of “the marvellous boy.” But as this introductory chapter must be mainly occupied with a recapitulation of biographical facts, nothing further than mere reference can be made to either Rossetti's early poetic or artistic achievements, regarding which a full account will be given in the chapters dealing with his career as poet and artist. After leaving the Academy schools he entered for a time as pupil (not by fee but by kindness) the studio of Mr. Ford Madox Brown, to whom the younger artist was ever through life willing to admit his early indebtedness; indeed, he may be



said to have been the first to awaken enthusiastic admiration in the young Rossetti of 1846-47, and this moreover by an early and ill-hung work in the Royal Academy. At the time Rossetti entered Mr. Madox Brown's studio the latter was engaged on the large picture of Chaucer at the Court of Edward III., which was subsequently bought by the Corporation of Sydney in New South Wales, a work, apart from its other great merits, remarkable for being the painter's first attempt in sunlight; and from witnessing such work as this no doubt in part grew the impulse of protest against artificial method that afterwards animated the young painters known as Preraphaelites—in part only, because, as I shall point out in the succeeding chapter on *The Preraphaelite Idea*, the famous art-movement was in reality mainly an artistic outcome of the wider Tractarian movement that so affected thinking minds amongst English-speaking peoples. The direct cause of the young student's admission as pupil to the latter's studio lay in an appeal by letter which Rossetti made subsequent to having seen and been greatly affected by the Westminster cartoons *Finding of the Body of Harold after the Battle of Hastings*, and *Justice*, which Mr. Madox Brown had contributed to the exhibitions of cartoons by candidates for the honour of selection for the mural decoration of the Houses of Parliament. About this time Rossetti's first oil picture was executed, a portrait, namely, of his father, which is still in the possession of the family; but on leaving, at least as a regular student, Mr. Madox Brown's studio for one leased in Cleveland Street, in fellowship with Mr. Holman Hunt, he began the often-referred-to painting which has more than once been designated as

the prototype in art of *The Blessèd Damozel* in literature, which, however, with all its merits of conception, intense earnestness, and simplicity, is certainly not the case—the execution of the one being perfect and that of the other immature; the picture in question being of course *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*. This interesting and impressive work was either finished in the Newman Street studio or in one in Red Lion Square, was exhibited in 1849 in the Free Exhibition held in the Portland Gallery, and was the second remunerative piece of work he had accomplished, the painting having found a purchaser at £80 in the person of the Marchioness of Bath, who afterwards gave it to the present owner, her daughter, Lady Louisa Feilding. Before this satisfactory event, however, Rossetti had made an acquaintance that was to ripen into the friendship of a lifetime. The young painter-poet came across some magazine verses, which he much admired, especially a ballad called *Rosabel*, and on the impulse at once wrote to the author, Mr. William Bell Scott. In writing, he also enclosed several short poems as specimens of his own poetic calibre, chief amongst the few being *My Sister's Sleep* and *The Blessèd Damozel*; and the letter, dated 25th November 1847 and signed "Gabriel Charles Rossetti," was full of enthusiastic feeling and a very characteristic *naïveté* in personal matters, and moreover contained one or two unusual or self-coined words, "*dignitous*" especially I remember. Mr. Scott has told me what he thought of the letter with the unknown signature when it reached him in Newcastle, where he was then residing, and how thoroughly surprised he was at its poetic contents—apparently the work of an Italian youth,

and work, moreover, as individual as it was fine, for it must be remembered that the mediæval movement, which in literature may be said to have commenced in earnest with the publication of the Oxford and Cambridge magazine in 1856, had then scarce received its first impulse, and that consequently such work as *The Blessèd Damsel* was doubly remarkable. In a word, it proves conclusively—as it did at the time to Mr. Scott—that the author was a man of original and powerful genius. Some months subsequent to the receipt of this letter Mr. W. B. Scott visited the studio in London, where the two young painters, Rossetti and Holman Hunt, were working at their first pictures, respectively *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and the *Oath of Rienzi*; and again he recognised the fact that a youth of genius was maturing for good work, and now in art, for despite certain technical drawbacks and unattractive colouring at the stage in which Mr. Scott saw *The Girlhood of Mary* he speedily recognised its intellectual earnestness and spiritual fervour. About this time Rossetti paid his first visit to the Continent, having for company a fellow-student; the trip, which was the outcome of the sale of his first picture, was, however, limited in duration and distance, consisting mainly of a visit to two or three old towns in Belgium. A poem called *The Carillon*, which will be quoted in Chapter V., is especially interesting as a record of this short tour that was confined to visiting Antwerp, Bruges, and Ghent; and even the direct mention in that poem of the Flemish painters Memmeling and Van Eyck does not express how deeply the young English artist appreciated their truthfulness and rich colour effects. I remember Rossetti's having

said he saw *nothing* when abroad, meaning thereby that his attention was given wholly to the works of these painters whose influence undoubtedly affected his early work, and to the exclusion of all sight-seeing, pictorial and otherwise. When at Bruges he heard the carillon of the famous bells while he was standing rapt in admiration of the technical mastership of the Flemish painters' productions, and this he has recorded in the fifth verse of the crudely-expressed but very individual poem already mentioned, and to be found only in the rare magazine *The Germ*:—

“John Memmeling and John Van Eyck  
Hold state at Bruges. In sore shame  
I scanned the works that keep their name.  
The Carillon, which then did strike  
Mine ears, was heard of theirs alike :  
It set me closer unto them.”

According to a sketch by Mr. Eyre Crowe, dated about this time, Rossetti must have had anything but a robust appearance, being very thin and even somewhat haggard in expression. He went about in a long swallow-tailed coat of what was even in 1848 an antique pattern. That his appearance in his twentieth and some subsequent years was that of an ascetic I have been told by several, including himself, and in addition to such pen-and-ink sketches as the above, and of himself sitting to his Miss Siddall (his future wife) for his portrait, there are the perhaps more reliable portraitures in Mr. Millais' *Isabella* (painted in 1849), and Mr. Deverell's *Viola*.<sup>1</sup> On

<sup>1</sup> In the first of these (which has been engraved recently in the *Art Journal*), Rossetti is the farthest on the right hand at the table, and in the second he is the Jester “singing an antique song,” while *Viola* herself was modelled from Miss Siddall.

the other hand, a beautifully-executed pencil head of himself in boyhood shows him much removed from the ascetic type of later years, not unlike and strongly suggestive of a young Keats or Chatterton; while in maturer age he carefully drew his portrait from his mirrored image, the result being a highly-finished pen-and-ink likeness. While speaking of portraits I may state that Rossetti was twice photographed, once in Newcastle (which is the one publicly known, and upon which all other illustrations have been based), and once standing arm-in-arm with Mr. Ruskin, the latter being the best likeness of the poet-artist as he was quarter of a century ago. There is also an etching by Mr. Menpes, which, however, is only founded on the well-known photograph; and finally, there is a portrait taken shortly after death by Mr. Frederick Shields.<sup>1</sup>

Either shortly before or shortly after the Belgium trip Rossetti composed the beautiful story called *Hand and Soul*, a fitting companion in its maturity of style and thought to *The Blessèd Damozel*. Portions of this are specially interesting from an autobiographical point of view, the passages in question having a direct bearing upon the artistic views of the author; but I will not here refer to it further, as it will be fully dealt with in the fourth chapter of this book, beyond stating that it excels anything of the kind in our language, or is at any rate only equalled in style by Mr. Walter Pater's exquisite "narrative," *The Child in the House*. It was not long after the composition of *Hand and Soul* that a meeting was

<sup>1</sup> There was a cast of his face taken after death, but it is alike misleading and unpleasant.

held in the studio at No. 83 Newman Street, the outcome of which was an organised body called the Pre-raphaelites, and the organ thereof styled *The Germ*. So much has been said for and against the Pre-raphaelite movement, it has incurred so much enmity and misrepresentation, and moreover as all facts concerning its origin are becoming somewhat vague and confused, I have devoted the following chapter to the consideration of it and *The Germ*; but I may here just mention that the movement was essentially a *protest*, and not merely the more or less earnest vagary of some enthusiastic young painters, and that Rossetti was essentially the animating or guiding member as well as original founder. To the Preraphaelite Brotherhood—the mysterious *P. R. B.*—neither Mr. W. Bell Scott nor Mr. Madox Brown belonged, as has sometimes been stated, both declining actual membership for the similar reason of disbelief in the suitability of cliques, and in this they were undoubtedly right, only being mistaken in not recognising the difference between a temporary organised union and a literary or artistic clique devoted to mutual admiration and general animadversion. Such cliques are the bane of all true change and advance in art, and still more in literature, and though it is true they have but their little day and are soon forgotten, save in semi-scornful reminiscence, they yet retard for a time the progress of better work than can be achieved by their own members, and only too frequently wound where they cannot kill. No one recognised this fact more than Rossetti himself, and he was ever wont to advise any young artist or writer to avoid joining or having anything to do with the mutual-admiration cliques that

are like mushroom-growths in the fields of literature and art.

Before the publication of *The Germ*, Rossetti made his first acquaintance with the poetry of Robert Browning. The *Sir Hugh The Heron* period was long past, and the mediæval sentiment had become an animating principle, when one day in the British Museum the author of *The Blessèd Damozel* and painter of *The Girlhood of Mary* came across a small volume called *Pauline*. The book had no name on the title-page but Rossetti felt certain it could be by no other than Mr. Browning, and, his admiration having been deeply stirred, wrote to the latter on the subject. Mr. Browning has told me that he received this letter while staying in Venice, that it came from one personally and altogether unknown to him, and that it was to the effect that the writer had come upon a poem in the British Museum which he copied the whole of from its being not otherwise procurable, that he judged it to be Mr. Browning's but could not be sure and wished the latter to pronounce on the matter, which Mr. Browning accordingly did. A year or two later, the elder poet had a visit in London from Mr. Allingham and a friend, who proved to be Rossetti; and when Mr. Browning heard that the latter was a painter he insisted on calling upon him despite protestations as to having nothing to show, which, in Mr. Browning's words, was far enough from the case. Subsequently, on another of the latter's periodical returns to London, Rossetti painted his portrait in water-colours, finishing it shortly after in Paris, whither he went once in 1855, and once in 1860; the first date being fixed in Mr. Browning's mind as that of the completion of the

portrait, by the fact that the latter was finished in the same year that Mr. Tennyson published *Maud*, and that he, Rossetti, and a few others were present at a private proof-reading. While there Rossetti made, from an unobserved coign of vantage, a rapid but very good pen-and-ink sketch of Mr. Tennyson as he read the proof-sheets of *Maud*, and this he gave to Mr. Browning, who still possesses and duly values it.<sup>1</sup>

To return to *The Germ* period. It was about this time or a year or so later that Rossetti, who had continued living (with studios elsewhere) in his parent's house at 50 Charlotte Street, Portland Place, whither Mr. and Mrs. Gabriele Rossetti had removed in 1833 from No. 38 in the same street, left home and took chambers in 14 Chatham Place, Blackfriars Bridge. No such place now exists, but before the erection of the present bridge a row of handsome houses so-called overlooked the Thames, and in these rooms some of the most important events of his life took place and many fine compositions in verse and on canvas saw the light. Amongst the first things he wrote in his own residence was the weird and dramatic ballad *Sister Helen*, which a year or two subsequently he sent to Mary Howitt for a magazine which she then edited and published in Germany and which was known as the *Düsseldorf Annual*. The poem is there printed as "*Sister Helen*. By H. H. H.," and on the margin of the copy of the pages belonging to Mr. William Rossetti,

<sup>1</sup> The sketch has a memorandum on the back of the frame with the date and particulars. The reading took place at 18 Dorset Street, Portman Square, on the 27th September 1855, and those present besides Mr. Tennyson were Mr. Browning, Mrs. E. B. Browning, Miss Arabella Browning, and Rossetti.



the following pencil note is inscribed by the author :—  
“ This is the first form in which the ballad was printed ; the pages are from the *Düsseldorf Annual*, printed in Germany about 1853 or '54, and edited by Mary Howitt, who asked me to contribute. She altered 'seeth'd' into 'melted.' I think the ballad had been written in 1851, or the beginning of '52. The initials as above were taken from the lead-pencil, because people used to say my style was hard.—D. G. R.”<sup>1</sup> A design fully as weird as the ballad of *Sister Helen* was made about the same time, the impressive and, comparatively speaking, well-known *How They Met Themselves*, called also *The Doubles*, and both titles suggesting the *Döppelgänger* legend on which it is, of course, founded. Rossetti at this time took pleasure in deriving subjects for pictorial designs from Mr. Browning's poetry, but at present it will be sufficient to merely mention the large painting begun on a hint given in *Pippa Passes*, but given up afterwards in despair owing to what were at that time insurmountable technical difficulties (and now extant only in part in a water-colour drawing called *Two Mothers*—certainly in name unsuggestive of *Kate the Queen*)—and in an interesting water-colour drawing founded on some lines in *The Laboratory*. But at the time of the composition of *The Doubles* he was enthusiastic on the merits of Sir Henry Taylor's *Philip van Artevelde*, the result of this enthusiasm being the powerful *Hesterna Rosa*, or *Elena's Song*, founded on some lines therein.

<sup>1</sup> These and many of the foregoing details will now be familiar to many who read the interesting and sympathetic article by Miss A. Mary F. Robinson in *Harper's Magazine* for October.

In 1853 Rossetti visited Mr. Scott in Newcastle, profiting much thereby in instruction in the technicalities of art. For the next four or five years he devoted himself to the production of those poetic and brilliantly-coloured small water-colours that are replete with such individuality and such charm, and of which Mr. George Rae of Birkenhead and Mr. William Graham possess so many striking examples; and, in addition to these, the fine designs for the illustrated "Tennyson quarto," published by Moxon, and the exquisite, if in drawing faulty, *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee*, of which Mr. Ruskin has spoken so highly: in literature, contributing some of his now well-known poems to the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, which lasted the twelve months of 1856. About 1857 the young painter was asked to take part in the decoration of the Union Debating Room at Oxford, and thus was originated what proved an experiment exerting a subsequent wide influence on English art; but as I shall, of course, have occasion to refer to the famous *Oxford Frescoes* in the portion of this book forming the artistic record I will not now dwell upon the subject, only regretting what has long been a matter of notoriety, that the so-called frescoes are fast fading and peeling off and threaten soon to become existent only in memory. In this undertaking, as wherever else he came into union with sympathetic workers, he took by right of strongest gift the place of guide and inspirer, the vigorously magnetic personality of the man being in itself almost sufficient to account for this,—that irresistible magnetism which may be defined as bodily genius. It was at this time that he made the acquaintance of Mr. William Morris, Mr.

Burne Jones, and Mr. A. C. Swinburne, who had just left Eton to become an undergraduate at Oxford,—of these he knew first Mr. Burne Jones, that gentleman having called upon him in London before the Oxford attempt was commenced. It is now a well-known fact that the famous painter of *Laus Veneris* and *The Golden Stairs* owed his embracing art as a profession to the advice and solicitation of the poet-artist who influenced also to such an extent Mr. Morris and Mr. Swinburne, Rossetti urging Mr. Burne Jones to give up the idea of entering the Church, and to study painting, for which he detected the latter's genius.

Early in 1860 Rossetti made great changes at 14 Chatham Place, enlarging the accommodation and adding in other ways to the comfort of his residence, and here in "the mating time o' the year" he brought home his wife, Elizabeth Eleanor Siddall. This lady, who was very beautiful, and who showed brilliant promise as a colourist, he had known for a considerable time, and the short-lived happiness of their union in some respects recalls another marriage of like with like when the author of *Aurora Leigh* married the author of *The Ring and the Book*. Her face is very familiar in compositions belonging to this period, but though there are one or two interesting portraits of her the best likeness in every way is the pathetically faithful face of Beatrice in the lovely *Beata Beatrix* belonging to Lord Mount-Temple,—painted, indeed, subsequent to the death of Mrs. Rossetti, but none the less a direct portrait. Several friends possess pencil and other drawings of her as she appeared before her husband in daily life, many of them of ex-

quisite and delicate execution, and in each there is to be traced the artist lover's gaze as it caught pose after pose and expression after expression, the latter, however, varying more in shades of sadness, for it seemed almost as if a premonition of early death overshadowed her life. In the year following their marriage a daughter was born, but only for death, and in February of 1862 Mrs. Dante Rossetti herself suddenly died. The blow was in many respects an exceptionally terrible one to Rossetti. In the impulse of his grief it came about that, before the coffin-lid was closed on the face he should not see on earth again, he hastily gathered together the MSS. of the greater number of the poems now so familiar in England and America, and laid them as a last gift on his wife's breast. As his chief friend, Mr. Theodore Watts, said in the obituary notice in the *Athenæum*, like Prospero he literally buried his wand. Many years passed, and still it seemed that the old interest and the old creative impulse would not again take possession of him, but this only in so far as concerns poetry; the statements in several press and other notices that he abandoned creative work of all kinds for a lengthened period being very far from the truth, as a glance at the years 1862 to 1869 (the period meant), in the supplementary list to Chapter III., at the end of this volume will show—a lustrum, and more, wherein some of the artist's most famous pictures were painted, amongst others, *Beata Beatrix*, *Sibylla Palmifera*, *Monna Vanna*, *Venus Verticordia*, *Lady Lilith*, and *The Belovéd*. At the time of his wife's death Rossetti was only thirty-three, yet at this early age he had accomplished work in art and literature which might well have been considered a fair achieve-

ment for a lifetime, and to realise this it is only necessary to call to mind such pictures as *The Girlhood of Mary*, *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, *Giotto Painting Dante's Portrait*, *Dante Painting the Angel*, the score or so Arthurian and Romantic water-colours, *Dante's Dream* (water-colour), *Mary Magdalene*, the *Passover* drawing, *The Gate of Memory*, *Mary in the House of John*, *Bocca Baciata*, the *Triptych for Llandaff Cathedral*, *Cassandra*, *Fair Rosamond*, *Penelope*, *Paolo and Francesca*, and others too numerous to mention,—and in literature, such compositions as *The Blessèd Damozel*, *My Sister's Sleep*, *The Burden of Nineveh*, *The Sea Limits*, *The Staff and Scrip*, *Ave*, *Sister Helen*, *Giorgione's Venetian Pastoral*, etc. He had also composed *Hand and Soul* in prose, and the widely-known translations from poets preceding and poets contemporary with Dante, including the finest rendering in our language of the *Vita Nuova*. The last-named, or rather the volume containing all the translations, was dedicated to his wife, its publication only taking place in the year before her death; the volume, issued subsequently with alterations and additions as *Dante and His Circle*, was dedicated in turn to his mother, “a book prized by her love.”

The rooms in Chatham Place now became unendurable to Rossetti, so as soon as was at all practicable he left them and took chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Here he remained for about six months, at the end of which time he took on a lease No. 16 Cheyne Walk, the well-known row looking out upon the river; and from this residence he never afterwards removed save on his rare visits or when residing at more or less lengthened intervals at Kelmscott Manor,

Lechlade. This fine old house was exactly suited for such a man as its last occupier. The studio, which was on the ground-floor, was large and roomy, and had a most convenient exit to the good stretch of latterly untended garden-ground behind, wherein for some two or three years past Rossetti took his only open-air exercise, and at the eastern window, close to which was the writing-desk, grew a tall sycamore, whose large delicate leaves, with their innumerable lights and shadows, made in summer a ceaseless shimmer of loveliness and in autumn waved to and fro like gold and amber flakes. Those who have seen the fine painting called *The Day-Dream* and one or two other pictures, and have noticed "the thronged boughs of the shadowy sycamore," will have seen the much-loved tree's representation on canvas. The garden itself must have seen in its time an assortment of animals infrequent near English households, from the wombat, which Mr. W. Bell Scott etched, to two armadilloes who were the last pets at 16 Cheyne Walk. In this house Rossetti for some time did not live alone, his brother being with him for a time, also his friend George Meredith for a brief period, Mr. Swinburne, and later on other friends either temporarily or for lengthened periods; but in five or six years his life became more and more solitary: he frequented less the "evenings" of such old friends as Mr. Madox Brown, Dr. Westland Marston, Mr. J. Knight, and others, and took his sole outdoor recreation in walking up and down the long garden and watching whatever bird or animal was then prime favourite. But his health was not now equal to what it was, though the brilliant intellect remained unclouded and the wit and conversational

power unimpaired; an increasing nervousness overtook him, and even a threatened loss of eyesight. The outcome of all this was the much dreaded and insidious complaint which so many emotional natures suffer from, insomnia; and though from this relief and rest were obtained by the use of chloral, which Rossetti commenced taking on the assurance, at that time so much brought forward, that the drug was harmless in its action, yet it was the use of this very sedative that so lamentably altered the temperament and shortened the life of the great poet and painter.

In the autumn of 1868 Rossetti went to join his friend Mr. W. B. Scott at Miss A. Boyd's romantic residence, Penkill Castle, in Ayrshire; and here he at last came to a decision regarding the exhumation of his buried MSS., of which some had been printed in *The Germ* and the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, others existed in copies formerly given to a few friends, and a few came slowly back on the insistent efforts of memory, but many were wholly forgotten, and the author could not be insensible to the fact that much good work had been put away in a manner that no "creator" has a right to do. He could not, however, bring himself to take direct action in the matter; but his still reluctant consent having been once obtained, there was no further delay save what was unavoidable. The consent of the Home Secretary came in course of time, and accordingly one night two of Rossetti's friends were present at the grave of Mrs. Rossetti in Highgate Cemetery, when the coffin was opened and the packet removed. The matter is too painful to dwell upon, indeed I might not have referred to

it at all had not the story been often repeated of late and with varying accounts; but the foregoing is exactly all that happened, and in due course of time the poems were printed, the author having recopied them all from the exhumed MSS. Towards 1869, besides the house in Cheyne Walk, he rented along with Mr. William Morris the Manor House, Kelmscott, near Lechlade in Gloucestershire, and here he stayed on and off, but principally at Cheyne Walk, till the autumn of 1872, but from that time till the summer of 1874 almost wholly at Kelmscott. Before this, however, Rossetti made a second visit in the autumn of 1869 to Penkill Castle, a visit in every way memorable, for here he definitely decided on publishing his poems and not printing them privately, as he had for some time intended; and it was here also that he wrote or thought of some of his finest productions, *The Stream's Secret* (the "stream" being the Penwhapple, running through the Penkill grounds till it joins Girvan Water and flows therewith to the sea), *Farewell to the Glen*, *Autumn Idleness*, *Troy-Town*, and *Eden Bower*. Despite the melancholy that at that time so greatly overclouded his life, I have often heard him speak of this visit as one of memorable enjoyment, the attention and care he received from his friend Miss Boyd being in itself sufficient to make the visit pleasant and memorable. Mr. Scott has told me how often after finishing his painting he used to go down to the glen and there find Rossetti sprawling in the long grass or lying in a narrow little cavern close to the murmuring burn and labouring hard at *The Stream's Secret*. It was from remembrances of Penkill that the idea of writing *The King's Tragedy* afterwards



entered Rossetti's mind, this having been suggested by the beautiful mural paintings illustrative of the *King's Quhair* with which the double staircase in Penkill Castle is decorated by Mr. Scott,—the patient and loving labour of years.

1870 is the year made memorable to all lovers of our noble poetic literature by the publication of the *Poems*. This volume, which had exercised so potent an influence years before it was ever made public, at once raised its author to the front rank of living poets, meeting as it did with almost universal acceptance and welcome. Here and there indeed, especially from the very conservative and clerical organs, censure and dislike found expression, but this was simply what was to be expected in the case of work not stamped by time and thus beyond their damnatory strictures. One well-known writer indeed wrote a bitter attack in the *Contemporary Review*, giving rise to the famous literary war of 1871 *in re The Fleshly School of Poetry*, when Mr. Buchanan's attack (by no means *wholly* devoid of basis as regards the *School*) was met and worsted by the fiery throng of words marshalled under Mr. Swinburne's *Under the Microscope*. From various causes the unjust and miscomprehensive attack of Mr. Buchanan deeply affected the then very precarious health of Rossetti; and was beyond doubt the most painful incident of the latter's literary career. Complete misapprehension is more trying to a poet than the severest strictures, and it was this that disappointed and wounded the author of *The House of Life*, and not a mere critical onslaught. I have no intention of again reopening a subject that would require a volume in itself for due explanation and examination, but

those desirous of further information may consult the letters exchanged by Mr. Rossetti and Mr. Buchanan which appeared in the *Athenæum* at the time, Mr. Swinburne's *Under the Microscope*, and Mr. Buchanan's *The Fleshly School of Poetry*.

In 1872 the health of the poet-artist completely gave way, and nervous prostration in its worst forms attacked him. The ceaseless care of his friends brought him from danger to comparative convalescence, and he was still further renovated by a month's visit (15th July to 15th August) at his friend Mr. William Graham's houses of Urrard and Stobhall in Perthshire. It was just after this illness that he made an acquaintance which rapidly ripened into a friendship which, equally with the friendship of much older standing of Mr. Madox Brown, he considered the most eventful in his life. Having had a desire to meet Mr. Theodore Watts, to whom he had been mentioned by mutual friends, he wrote to the latter to that effect, and circumstances ere long brought them together. In every sense of the word the friendship thus begun resulted in the greatest benefit to the elder writer, the latter having greater faith in Mr. Watts' literary judgment than seems characteristic with so dominant and individual an intellect as that of Rossetti. Although the latter knew well the sonnet-literature of Italy and England, and was such a practised master of the "heart's-key" himself, I have heard him on many occasions refer to Theodore Watts as having still more thorough knowledge on the subject and as being the most original sonnet-writer living. It is generally the case in literary lives, as well as in most others, that some special friendship is

indissolubly connected with each great writer, and is almost invariably suggested by remembrance of the personality thereof—thus we cannot disassociate Shakespeare and the “Will” of the sonnets (whether the Earl of Pembroke or Earl of Southampton), Milton and Edward King (*Lycidas*), Shelley and Trelawney, Keats and Arthur Severn, or Tennyson and Arthur Hallam,—and in like manner it will henceforth be difficult to separate in memory Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the friend whom he loved and admired beyond other men and to whom he dedicated his most mature and greatest work. Not infrequently has it been remarked to me that with his generosity and good-fellowship Rossetti had yet little capability of deep affection and certainly no demonstrative emotion: I know that personally I found him ever affectionately considerate, and generous of heart in a way that few are able to be with men younger than themselves and with no pretensions to equality, and that his friendship *as* friendship has been to me one of the chief boons of my life. This I know for myself, and I have heard him again and again, and down to my very last visit to him, speak of Mr. Theodore Watts, for instance, in terms of love and trust that could have come from no other than a loving nature; and that his friendships were not limited to artistic or literary circles is manifest in his having welcomed as intimate acquaintances gentlemen such as Mr. William Graham, Mr. George Rae, Mr. W. A. Turner, Mr. L. R. Valpy, Mr. H. V. Tebbs, and others not directly associated with the arts. I am sure there is not one of those whom I have mentioned who could not bear testimony to the kindly and generous

heart that so recently ceased to beat. It is true indeed that he was not always quite equal to himself, for the fatal effects of a constant use of a dangerous drug and the irritation of a ruined constitution frequently made him say unjust words that rose as it were on the surface and not from the depths—and on such occasions he was afterwards more grieved than any one concerned, and more than ordinary allowance should be made for any one who suffers from this well-known effect of chloral. Another thing must be taken into consideration, namely, the irresistibly imaginative groove in which his thoughts moved and which made it often difficult for him to resist the temptation of exaggeration in recounting any personal narrative and in praise or denunciation. He offended many by this recklessness, but those who really knew him overlooked these minor inconsistencies and forgave much where they gained much more. The time has not yet come to write a really complete biography of Dante Rossetti, but it is much to be hoped that in the course of a few years, when time has somewhat more adequately adjusted the too diverse lights of the present into an exact focus, the friend who knew him best of recent years, and whom Rossetti himself wished to undertake the task, Mr. Theodore Watts, should write the comprehensive and permanent account of the eventful forty years of the man whose genius is so undoubtedly great, and whose influence in two directions has been so marked.

From the latter part of 1872 to 1874 Rossetti was almost wholly at Kelmscott Manor, a fine old house of the time of Elizabeth, on the banks of the

Thames. Here he spent some of the happiest years of his life, devoting himself to painting and to the study, though not the production, of poetry, seeing only Mr. Watts constantly, and a very few friends,—his mother and sister, Mr. Madox Brown, Mr. Morris, Mr. Scott, Dr. and Mr. George Hake (the latter having lived with him for a time as friend and secretary), occasionally Mr. F. R. Leyland and Mr. Howell, and perhaps one or two others. Besides producing such pictures as *Proserpine* and others of his finest three-quarter lengths, he may be said to have gone through an entire course of reading. He was extremely fond at this time of reading aloud, and I have heard Mr. Watts say that Rossetti, while at Kelmscott, read out to him during the long winter evenings at various times many of the novels of Alexandre Dumas and nearly the whole of Shakespeare. It was now indeed that he made that thorough study of the text of Shakespeare for which he was afterwards remarkable. His health too at this period may, for him, for a considerable time be said to have been perfect, and he used to take long walks by the river,—one reminiscence of which will be found in the verses called *Down Stream*, in the reissued *Poems* of 1882. From 1874 onward till the autumn of 1880 he remained exclusively at 16 Cheyne Walk, seeing few friends as visitors and still fewer as regular comers, amongst the latter (if I am not forgetting) being only Mr. Watts, Mr. Shields, Mr. Scott, Mr. Treffry Dunn, Mr. Leyland, Mr. P. B. Marston, Mr. Hall Caine, and myself.

While still in the prime of life the energies of the body slowly weakened, and at last in the autumn of 1881

Rossetti went with Mr. Hall Caine, a gentleman who from the summer of 1881 onward generously devoted the greater part of his time to residence with and care of the poet-painter, to the Vale of St. John, in Cumberland. He returned, however, little if at all the better for the change and had soon to spend the greater part of each day in bed, a partial paralysis of the left arm causing him great anxiety and trouble. As the weeks went past the few friends who had access to him were sometimes hopeful, sometimes the reverse, but none anticipated the rapidly approaching end, for in the first place the sufferer had originally had an iron constitution, and in the next his illness was at no time apparently so severe as in 1872. In January or early in February, and on medical advice, he took advantage of a kind offer of Mr. Seddon, who volunteered the loan of Westcliffe Bungalow at Birchington-on-Sea, and here Rossetti and Mr. Caine removed, followed in a short time by Mrs. Rossetti senior and Miss Christina Rossetti. Mr. Watts, Mr. Shields, Mr. F. R. Leyland, myself, and one or two others visited him regularly from this date till Easter drew near. When I last saw him, exactly a week before his death, I had little idea it was for the last time; indeed, he seemed to me to be slowly but surely recovering, and laughed and talked with his old heartiness. He had greatly enjoyed the recent writing of an amusing ballad, and had just composed two fine sonnets on the well-known design of the Sphinx, called *The Question* (composed in 1875), and was moreover full of plans for future work; his tone of mind altogether being very different from the melancholy and depression that had been with him constantly for many months.

Six days later he was to recognise that these plans would never be fulfilled, and that he himself was about to obtain the answer to that question which his design represented as unanswerable in life. On Good Friday it became certain that he was nearing his end, and though on Saturday he did not seem worse he realised the truth himself, stating that he had no wish to live longer as the period of really good work had quite or nearly reached its close. On Sunday he was again more hopeful, the instinctive clinging to life and instinctive creative faculty alike urging him to wish for prolongation of his years. But it was not to be. Between nine and ten on Sunday night he gave two short sharp cries, and about a quarter of an hour later died quietly and without pain. At the last his brother and mother and sister were with him, as also Mr. Theodore Watts, Mr. Hall Caine, Mr. Shields, and the local physician, Dr. Harris.

Thus at the early age of fifty-three passed away a painter such as English art had not hitherto known, a poet that in contemporary literature takes his place in the front rank. In the ensuing pages I shall endeavour to trace out his work and influence in both creative fields, and here I will only remark that his death brings home to us more decisively than before that in Dante Gabriel Rossetti we had a writer and an artist whose name will surely sound in the ears of posterity as now sound in ours the names of William Mallord Turner in art and possibly Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Keats in literature. Great in two great arts, he will be regarded by future generations in a way that is impossible now and until all prejudices silt away like loose sand in an oncoming

tide, until truth asserts itself and party passions have passed away like mists before the morning. An ardent and appreciative critic, he seldom failed to select the peculiar excellences of any poem by a contemporary writer he might be reading, irrespective of the author's celebrity or insignificance; and it was the same in art, the mention at any time of such names as Sir Frederick Leighton, Sir Noel Paton, Millais, Holman Hunt, Frederick Shields, Ford Madox Brown, W. B. Scott, the late Samuel Palmer, Frederick Sandys, and others, being at once resultant in trenchant and generous remarks. In poetry he held Tennyson to be the greatest poet of the period, and he was gratified as if by a personal pleasure when Mr. Theodore Watts, also an ardent believer in Tennyson, wrote his fine sonnet to the Laureate, with the inscription "On his publishing in his seventy-first year the most richly-various volume of English verse that has appeared in his own century." He appreciated to a generous extent the poetry of present younger writers, but failed to see in nine-tenths of it any of that originality and individual *aura* that characterise work that will stand the stress of time; but of the poems of Mr. Philip Bourke Marston he spoke ever in the highest terms, regarding him as undoubtedly the most gifted of all the younger men. I have heard him declare Mr. Marston's early poem called *A Christmas Vigil*, written in the author's twentieth year and under the terrible disadvantage of blindness, to be more memorable than any of his own early productions, and many of his friends may recollect the generous pleasure he used to take in reciting some of the *Garden Secrets* which have been so widely appreciated in America as well as in England. Amongst men of



maturer years he was wont to speak admiringly of such poets as Dr. Gordon Hake and John Nichol, regarding the latter's *Hannibal* a peculiarly fine dramatic composition.

As to the personality of Dante Gabriel Rossetti much has been written since his death, and it is now widely known that he was a man who exercised an almost irresistible charm over most with whom he was brought in contact. His manner could be peculiarly winning, especially with those much younger than himself, and his voice was alike notable for its sonorous beauty and for a magnetic quality that made the ear alert whether the speaker was engaged in conversation, recitation, or reading. I have heard him read, some of them over and over, all the poems in the *Ballads and Sonnets*, and especially in such productions as *The Cloud Confines* was his voice as stirring as a trumpet tone; but where he excelled was in some of the pathetic portions of the *Vita Nuova*, or the terrible and sonorous passages of *L' Inferno*, when the music of the Italian language found full expression indeed. His conversational powers I am unable adequately to describe, for during the four or five years of my intimacy with him he suffered too much from ill health to be a consistently brilliant talker, but again and again I have seen instances of those marvellous gifts that made him at one time a Sydney Smith in wit and a Coleridge in eloquence. In appearance he was if anything rather over middle height, and, especially latterly, somewhat stout; his forehead was of splendid proportions, recalling instantaneously to most strangers the Stratford bust of Shakespeare; and his gray-blue eyes were clear and piercing, and characterised by that rapid

penetrative gaze so noticeable in Emerson. He seemed always to me an unmistakable Englishman, yet the Italian element was frequently recognisable; as far as his own opinion is concerned, he was wholly English. Possessing a thorough knowledge of French and Italian, he was the fortunate appreciator of many great works in their native language, and his sympathies in religion, as in literature, were truly catholic. To meet him even once was to be the better of it ever after; those who obtained his friendship cannot well say all it meant and means to them; but they know that they are not again in the least likely to meet with such another as Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Having had little to do during his life with Royal Academies or Public Exhibitions, this brief introductory chapter on the personal history of Dante Rossetti may fitly be closed by extracts from the voluntary acknowledgments of two well-known art corporations.

Sir Frederick Leighton, as President of the Royal Academy, remarked in his Banquet-speech:—

“I cannot pass on to lighter topics without allusion to the loss, within the year, of two most noteworthy artists who did not sit within our fold. One was John Linnell, etc. etc. The other was a strangely interesting man, who, living in almost jealous seclusion as far as the general world was concerned, wielded nevertheless at one period of his life a considerable influence in the world of Art and Poetry—Dante Gabriel Rossetti, painter and poet. A mystic by temperament and right of birth, and steeped in the Italian literature of the mystic age, his works in either art are filled with a peculiar fascination and fervour, which attracted to him from those who enjoyed his intimacy a rare degree of admiring devotion. Such a man could not leave the world unnoticed here, and I am glad to think it is within these walls that the public will see next winter a selection of the works of these artists whom the Academy did not count among her members.”

At the last April meeting of the Royal Scottish Academy the following record was made on the minutes :—

“The Council have heard with much regret of the death on Sunday last of Mr. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whose many-sided and original genius and high accomplishments, not only as a painter but as a poet also, have shed a lustre on the artistic profession. From his supersensitive aversion to ‘exhibitions,’ his thoughtful and imaginative pictures are but little known to the general public ; but his influence on contemporary English art has confessedly been very great, while that of his poetry has been more widely and markedly felt. Probably few artists of more distinct individuality and intellectual force ever appeared ; and his removal in the full maturity of his power cannot but be regarded as a heavy loss to art and literature.”

## CHAPTER II.

### THE PRERAPHAELITE IDEA—THE GERM.

No action, however seemingly individual, springs from an original personal impulse alone. The greatest men of genius—Æschylus, Plato, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare—do not stand forth in their respective generations as deviators from the intellectual life of their fellow-men, with an antecedent as well as contemporary separation—but are each the outcome of circumstance. Dante is not so absolutely individual as to seem to us detachable from his time: he was led up to through generations of Florentine history. There is no such thing as an absolute independency of antecedents; and what is true of the individual is true of any movement in the intellectual or social evolution of man. By the way in which the movement known as the *Preraphaelite* has been and is even yet spoken of, it would seem to be regarded by many as a mere eccentric aberration from orthodox methods, sprouting up irresponsibly and unexpectedly, and with the sudden sterile growth of the proverbial mushroom. But that this is far from being the case any one having any real knowledge of our antecedent art and literature will know well: that it *could not* be the case will at once be recognised by any student of historic evolution.

The latter half of the nineteenth century has been fitly called the English Renaissance. But this term would be quite out of place if applied only to the outcome of Preraphaelite principles; for the spirit of change has been at work not only in one or two arts, and amongst but a small band of enthusiasts, but in all the arts, in social life and thought, in science, and in political development, and amongst all the foremost men of the day—scientists, poets, artists, philosophers, religionists, and politicians. Indeed, to say the breath of change has passed over our time is not sufficiently adequate, for if we contrast the present with so late a period as thirty years ago we will perceive that there has been nothing short of a national awakening. The national mind, as represented by the great mass of intelligent fairly cultivated people, may be likened to the very sunflower the ultra-æstheticists have brought into such disrepute, turning towards a light of which the need is felt—the same light, whether it is the *Beautiful* of the artist and poet, the *Truth* of the philosopher, or the *Higher Morality* of the teacher and the priest. In religion, and in what is now called sociology, as well as in literature, the first stirrings of this awakening spirit appear unmistakably, if faintly, towards the close of the last century. Before Byron and Keats and Shelley and Coleridge and Wordsworth there was “something in the air,” the first indefinite revulsion from the bugbear of an effete pseudo-classicism; such a pseudo-classicism as received in France its deathblow on a certain evening in February 1830, when *Hernani* was the victorious standard of the Romanticists. But as these stirrings grew and grew the hearts of men of true genius took fire with a new

enthusiasm, and in poetic literature there came that splendid outburst of Romanticism in which Coleridge was the first and most potent participant. Human thought flows onward like a sea, where flow and ebb alternate; hence after the deaths of Shelley and Keats and Byron and Coleridge there came the lapse that preludes the new wave. At last a time came when a thrill of expectation, of new desire, of hope, passed through the higher lives of the nation; and what followed hereafter were the Oxford movement in the Church of England, the Preraphaelite movement in art, and the far-reaching Gothic Revival. Different as these movements were in their primary aims, and still more differing in the individual representations of interpreters, they were in reality closely interwoven, one being the outcome of the other. The study of mediæval art, which was fraught with such important results, was the outcome of the widespread ecclesiastical revival, which in its turn was the outcome of the Tractarian movement in Oxford. The influence of Pugin was potent in strengthening the new impulse, and to him succeeded Ruskin with *Modern Painters* and Newman with the *Tracts for the Times*. Primarily, the Preraphaelite movement had its impulse in the Oxford religious revival; and however strange it may seem to say that such men as Holman Hunt and Rossetti and, later, Frederick Shields followed directly in the footsteps of Newman and Pusey and Keble, it is indubitably so. Theoretical divergence on minor points does not militate against certain men, whether writers or artists, being classed together, so long as in the main the outcome of their endeavours assimilates. Between two such artists as Dante Rossetti and Mr. Frederick

Shields there is, of necessity, much in common, and in their work in art there is an unmistakable affinity ; yet to the one the " Gothic " spirit powerfully appealed, and to the other, I think I am not mistaken in saying, it seems fitter for a crude age than for one which would cultivate the highest art.

*Earnestness* was at the period of which I am speaking the watchword of all those who were in revolt against whatever was effete, commonplace, or unsatisfactory. Religion and art were closer drawn to one another than had yet been the case in England, and it seemed as if at last the two were going to walk hand in hand ; and even when the twain were not directly united in spirit, there was a determination to get at the truth of things, to work in the most absolute sincerity, that made the pursuit of art a very different thing from what it too generally was. It could not have been otherwise but that such a man as John Ruskin was at once and strongly attracted to the programme and initiatory works of the young artists known as the *Preraphaelites*, for in them he recognised men of undoubted talent and possessed with a new purpose—talents such as had not been exercised in art since Albert Dürer, and a purpose vital with truth and throbbing with the pulse of ardent and lofty endeavour. Their choice of designation could not be said to be fortunate ; for, apart from anything else, the mere selection of an epithet like *Preraphaelite* was a mistake, playing as it did into the hands of those whose chief weapon was ridicule. The term, as a definitive title, was quite a misnomer ; for between the works of the band of artists who preceded Raphael, and those who were called after them in the nine-

teenth century, there was no real resemblance; the only bond that united them being that of going direct to nature for inspiration and guide, for, as Mr. Ruskin points out, the young brotherhood of contemporary artists were altogether superior to the Italian Preraphaelites in skill of manipulation, power of drawing, and knowledge of effect; as superior in these as they were inferior in grace of design. To the title must certainly be imputed at least part of the widespread misunderstanding that beset the early efforts of Millais, Holman Hunt, Rossetti, and others, that they imitated, perhaps intentionally and perhaps not, the *errors* of the early Italian painters. And certainly the "Brotherhood" got their fair share of scornful contempt, too frequently, unfortunately, undergoing also the mortification of imputed falsity to art, and not infrequently suffering from the stings of personal spite. But if the public, or at least the critical public, was to them a huge and threatening Goliath, their spirits were soon to take new courage for suddenly a very David came forth as their champion, and Ruskin in the *Times*, in *Modern Painters*, and elsewhere, spoke of their efforts with characteristic dogmatic conviction, insisting on the young painters' rectitude of aim and frequent beauty of accomplishment, and scornfully dismissing, amongst others, such antagonistic assertions as were constantly repeated regarding the absence of perspective in Preraphaelite work, by such counter-blasts as: "There was not a single error in perspective in three out of the four pictures in question. I doubt if, with the exception of the pictures of David Roberts, there was one architectural drawing in perspective on the walls of the Academy. I never met with but two



men in my life who knew enough of perspective to draw a Gothic arch in a retiring plane so that its lateral dimensions and curvatures might be calculated to scale from the drawing. Our architects certainly do not, and it was but the other day that, talking to one of the most distinguished amongst them, the author of several valuable works, I found he did not know how to draw a circle in perspective.”<sup>1</sup>

It is no wonder that Mr. Ruskin, and for that matter many of the public as well, welcomed the conscientious endeavours of the Preraphaelites, when, in his own words, he asks us to look around at our exhibitions “and behold the ‘cattle-pieces,’ and ‘sea-pieces,’ and ‘fruit-pieces,’ and ‘family-pieces,’ the eternal brown cows in ditches, and white sails in squalls, and sliced lemons in saucers, and foolish faces in simpers, and try to feel what we are, and what we might have been.”

Of course, as always with anything that is new and non-artificial as opposed to insincerity, the loudest and most virulent outcry was anonymous. Behind the safe shelter of the journalistic “We” many a skirmisher fired off his bullets of ignorant criticism and disguised malice, at times hurting, it is true, but never mortally wounding. It is the nature of these ephemera to discharge their poison and then pass away, and though for a time the sufferer may smart and perhaps be inconvenienced by their stings it is not for long, if he have that in him which is of worth.

But equally, of course, the objecting side wrote not

<sup>1</sup> *Preraphaelitism*, 1851. See also the somewhat too insisted on opinions regarding the value of correct perspective expressed in the Preface to *The Elements of Drawing*.

entirely anonymously. Then, and later, there were well-known writers who put forward their non-appreciative or partly appreciative opinions on Preraphaelitism, qualified authors like Mr. Hamerton and Mr. Palgrave in England, and Messieurs Prosper Merimée, Henri Delaborde, Eugène Forgues, J. Milsand, and Henri Taine, in France.

The writer whose antagonistic criticisms took the most permanent form was the Rev. E. Young, who in 1857 published a considerable volume entitled *Preraphaelitism*, the outcome of a pamphlet bearing mainly on the same subject. The first impression one gains from this book is that its title should have been *John Ruskin : An Impeachment*, and the next is a growing doubt as to Mr. Young's qualifications for his self-set critical task. As an instance in support of the latter assertion I quote a passage from page 75 of his work, wherein he speaks as follows of an artist whom the world at large has recognised as one of the greatest of all times:—"Turner is in all this the faithful type of all Preraphaelitism—I mean a want of selection, a want of discrimination, a want of judgment, a want of special sympathy with the grand, the solemn, the tender, and the beautiful; a want of keeping things in their right places, a want of distinguishing the master chords from the inconsequential notes of nature's music."

Again, he says (page 203): "I suppose no intelligent eye can look on Raffaele's *Lo Spasimo*, Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, or I might even say Michael Angelo's *Raising of Lazarus*, painted by Del Piombo, without recognising more or less the *Greek conception*." The Rev. E. Young may here be right, but I confess I fail

to see the assimilitude of either *Lo Spasimo*, the *Last Supper*, or the *Raising of Lazarus*, to *The Greek*; in the severity of outline and modelling alone in Da Vinci's great work there is that which is not alien certainly, but both *Lo Spasimo* and the *Raising of Lazarus* seem to me, alike in treatment as in subject, especially foreign to the artistic mind of the great nation of antiquity.

What the Rev. E. Young seems to find especially objectionable in such painters as Holman Hunt and Rossetti is their having the boldness and unqualified rashness to deal with Religion in Art. "All I ask," he exclaims, "is that heaven-born Realists would at least abstain from Scripture subjects." We have the contrary view in Mr. Ruskin's second paper in *The Nineteenth Century* on *The Three Colours of Pre-raphaelitism*: "But such works as either of these painters have done, without antagonism or ostentation, and in their own true instincts; as all Rossetti's drawing from the life of Christ, more especially that of the Madonna gathering the bitter herbs for the Passover when He was twelve years old; and that of the magdalen leaving her companions to come to Him,—these, together with all the mythic scenes which he painted from the *Vita Nuova* and *Paradiso* of Dante, are of quite imperishable power and value." The Rev. E. Young's dislike to Holman Hunt, Rossetti, and others having anything to do with religious art, does not prevent his condescending to explain that he does not necessarily wish realistic painters to be done away with altogether. The same apparently as regards poets; for, in his own words, he has "no more desire that, because the antique is above the life, there should

be no such beings as realistic painters than that, because Homer and Milton are in the first order of poets, there should be no such persons as Crabbe and Wordsworth. All I ask is that heaven-born Realists would at least abstain from Scripture subjects." By this I suppose Mr. Young would look upon Wordsworth as not open to objection so long as he kept to his realistic studies of peasant life, but as deserving of the critical lash whenever attempting such work as the *Sonnet on Westminster Bridge*, the *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, and the personal epic of *The Excursion*. Yet "such a person" as Wordsworth, despite this indifference, is even yet regarded by some people as a great poet; and Holman Hunt, D. G. Rossetti, J. E. Millais, and others, have not yet sunk into their doubtless deserved oblivion. Mr. Young unduly disparages Giotto amongst the older masters whom he so reverences, perhaps because of the very reason that made Ruskin compare Millais to him as a protester "of vitality against mortality, of spirit against letter, and of truth against tradition."<sup>1</sup> Nor does he seem to understand Mr. Ruskin when the latter explains the true reason of the greatness of Giotto by saying: "It was not by greater learning, not by the discoveries of new theories of art, not by greater taste, not by the ideal principles of selection, that he became the head of the progressive schools of Italy. It was simply by being interested in what was going on around him, by substituting the gestures of living men for conventional attitudes, and portraits of living men for conventional faces, and incidents of everyday life for conventional circumstances, that he became great and the master of

<sup>1</sup> Notice for the Arundel Society.

the great.”<sup>1</sup> The rock of “Truth” is that with which Mr. Young on more than one occasion collides; the problem of what is truth, things in their actuality or things in their relativity? And it is in common with Mr. Young that so many, both opponents and partisans, have come to grief; for the whole question of the “Pre-raphaelite Idea” has been simply the question of how to treat truth, fact. Mr. Young and no doubt many think the matter is easily settled, and prove at once to their own satisfaction the orthodoxy of their position; but however apparently such may seem in the right a flaw is sometimes discoverable in their argument. The following represents not alone the argument of Mr. Young, but of many who have given forth publicly or privately their opinions in solution of this problem. “Nothing easier,” says Mr. Young, “nothing easier, of course, than to talk of ‘truth and nature.’ But as I have asked already, *What Truth?* Is it abstract, general, comprehensive? or personal, local, circumstantial, idiosyncratic truth? So again of ‘Nature.’ *What Nature?* Is it human nature? or an individual piece of it? Is it typical or actual? noble or ignoble nature? Do you see it in the Apollo, or in the filthy Ganymede of Rembrandt? Both are nature: which do you mean when you oppose the words ‘truth and nature’ to ‘tradition.’ A man may prefer the cabbage-stump to the lily; but is the lily, therefore, not nature? There is, if I may be allowed the expression, a lily-humanity and a cabbage-stump humanity.” It is in the last sentence that we discover the cloven hoof: the lily and cabbage-stump theory is here, as all along, a mistake; for it is *not* a

<sup>1</sup> *Notice for the Arundel Society.*

lily instead of a cabbage. but the *fittingness* of a cabbage and lily respectively. If a painter like Fra Angelico on the one hand, and Millais or Holman Hunt on the other, were to paint the same scene—say “Christ healing the sick”—the productions would be very opposite; but because the work of the Fra Angelic painter would be utterly unreal to fact, however true to the *inner truth*, to the “eternal verities,” surely this is no reason why the work of the later artist, true to the facts of costume, country, and time, and at the same time equally true in inspiration, should be inferior? But Mr. Young, and those who stand in the same position, ignore the possibility of an artist combining realism and idealism in his work—or rather, they would say the true idealism includes whatever of realism is necessary. And it must be admitted that, at the best, historic painting or religious painting based on historic fact, can only be approximately true; and it may have been the recognition of this that made such men as Raffaele paint poor Galilean fishermen in flowing robes, preferring typical representations to historic accuracy. But these are not the times of Raffaele, and owing to the enormous extension of knowledge, not only in regard to our immediate surroundings but also in regard to man’s environment in the past, the necessity for truth, or the closest possible approximation to truth, is expected of the latter-day artist. And surely this natural evolution does not militate against an equally natural evolution of imagination? An imaginative idea, a lofty conception, may be not the less great because it be married to relative as well as absolute truth; nor does the imagination that ignores fact necessarily in that very

ignoring attain the loftiest height. Is the symbolism of Hunt's *Scapegoat* less effective because the landscape of the picture is true both to nature and to the part of the country wherein happened the historic fact upon which the idea of the picture is based? Would it have been more so if the goat had been more ideal in portraiture, and the landscape an English common or Italian plain? Granted equality of imaginative insight, surely it is well that in a picture truth should satisfy the mind as well as the idea affect the spirit; and this even if the truth be only approximate. In painting Cæsar, even if we cannot represent the great statesman-warrior as he seemed to his contemporaries, we would not make an ideal Englishman of him, but would make his representation Italian, Roman, in the first place, and then from the record of historian, carved gem, or impressed coin, complete in detail what would be necessary to realise the mental conception. That a Nemesis pursues the Realist it is true, showing him that after all his ideal of realisation of things past is frequently futile. Yet this is no reason why realism in high art is false: for in what is there no Nemesis? The Idealist will not deny the dreaded following footsteps. A marked instance of this frequent futility in realistic work is afforded in Holman Hunt's *Christ among the Doctors*, of which Mons. Milsand narrates<sup>1</sup>—  
“*Après avoir examiné le tableau une dame juive dit gravement :—‘ Cela est fort beau, seulement on voit que l’auteur ne connaissait pas le trait distinctif de la race de Juda ; il a donné à ses docteurs les pieds plats qui sont de la tribu de Ruben, tandis que les hommes de Juda avaient le cou-de-pied fortement cambré ! ’*” As M.

<sup>1</sup> *L'Esthétique Anglaise*, par J. Milsand. 1864.

Milsand's remarks, here Mr. Hunt's Preraphaelite accuracy has been his Nemesis; for in endeavouring to be literally true to nature he has only succeeded in obtaining a general Jewish type and not those differences at once palpable to a people acquainted with their own characteristics.

However, if one must err, it is well to err on the safe side. There are many even now who would echo the Prior and his art-friends in Browning's poem, who rated the young painter-brother for painting from nature, from life, instead of "idealising"—

“How? what's here?  
Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!  
Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true  
As much as pea and pea! It's devil's game!  
Your business is not to catch men with show,  
With homage to the perishable clay,  
But lift them over it, ignore it all,  
Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.  
Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms.”

To all such no better reply could be given than Fra Lippo Lippi's own words—

“Now, is this sense, I ask?  
A fine way to paint soul, by painting body  
So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further  
And can't fare worse. . . . .  
Why can't a painter . . . . .  
Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,  
Both in their order?”

Speaking of realistic treatment, Mr. Young says scornfully: “Here is a country wench with a child on a donkey. This also is a plain fact. Will you call it



*The Flight into Egypt?*" Well, I would say in reply, "Here is the picture of an Italian lady with a haloed infant on an ass, gay with embroidered trappings. Will you call it *The Flight into Egypt?*" The truth is that a representation of the former would no more be a true Preraphaelite picture than would the latter. Because Mary was a countrywoman of Syria there would be no reason why she should be delineated as an English "country wench," nor for the matter of that as with unrefined features at all. Looking at her simply as Mary, she could have been no ordinary maiden; she was probably, as Rénan has said, a visionary of a lofty, pure, and refined nature, and therefore a painter would be quite justified in idealising the model he might paint her from to a result consistent with his conception. She would still be but a Nazarene woman seated on an ass with the child of her great hope in her arms and her high serenity of soul manifest in her expression. Surely such a representation, true as far as practicable to historical and local truth, while fully permeated with the essence of high spiritual conception, would appeal as powerfully to the religious sense, and far more effectively to the higher artistic, than a picture where a young Italian or Spanish woman, however beautiful, rode out in flight through the desert, clothed with utterly improbable garments, and with a child Christ depending upon a gold halo to give to the beholder the sense of religious sacredness? Of course some, as the Rev. E. Young, would argue that these varied and splendid garments of the Virgin were symbolical, or were the representation of a higher truth than that of actuality; but wherein this higher truth consists I fail to see.

Roman Catholics would say that the splendour of the Papal and Cardinal robes is in conformity with the dignity of being Christ's apostolic followers; but surely the white robe of the Carthusian and the brown of the Franciscan are alike more dignified and nearer the truth, actual and ideal.

Preraphaelitism is not simply another name for Photography, not what the Rev. E. Young calls it, "a mere heartless reiteration of the model." The absurd accusation was made against the Preraphaelites that their paintings were in reality copied photographs, a charge that Mr. Ruskin effectually dissipated by challenging any one to produce a Preraphaelite picture by that process. It is strange that now that Preraphaelitism has become a phrase of the past the tradition of its synonymity with photography should still exist, for only the slightest knowledge of the latter science is required to show the wide difference there is between it and *art*. The other day I was looking at the picture of one of our most eminent sea-painters, and more than once I heard the remark "that it was too photographic:" well, this painter's method of delineation may or may not be the true way to represent the ever-changing and multiform beauty of the sea, but one thing is certain, that it is beyond any photograph. No painter worthy of the name could paint a picture of the sea or marine coast that would not contain many more facts than any photograph could possibly do, for the limitations of the scientific method are such as to preclude more than perhaps but one truth being given at a time. If mere accumulation of facts were all that were wanted, then doubtless a series of positives would be more valuable than the picture

of an artist. Suppose what is wanted is a representation of the Dover Cliffs as viewed midway in the Channel, with a fresh south-west breeze blowing through the summer day, what would the painter give us? There would be overhead the deep blue of mid-heaven, gradated into paler intensity as the eye ranged from the zenith; here and there would move northwards and eastwards (granting the wind-current to be the same at their elevation) fringed drifts of cloud whiter than snow, while down in the south-west great masses of rounded cumuli would rise above the horizon, compact, like moving alps; the sea between the painter and the cliffs would be dazzling with the sun-glare, and the foam of the breaking waves constantly flashing along the glitter of the sparkling blue: here the sea would rival the sky, there it would seem as though dyed with melted amethysts, and farther on where dangerous shallows lurked pale green spaces would stretch along; outward-bound, some huge ocean steamer would pass in the distance, with a thin film of blue smoke issuing from her funnel, and, leaning over with her magnificent cloud of canvas, a great ship from Austral or Pacific ports would overtake a French lugger making for Calais, or a heavily-built coaster bound for London; dotted here and there would be the red sails of the fishing boats, quite a cloud of them far away on the right, and beyond the red sails the white cliffs, surge-washed at their bases, and at their summits green with young grass. Words can give no idea of these cliffs, however, as they would really seem to the painter—the marvellous blending of colours, the shades of delicate gray deepening to purple, the glow of minute vegetation seeming like

patches of orange light, the whitest portions seeming dusky in contrast with the snowy cloud and the glitter of the sea. No painter could transfer this scene to canvas as it appeared to him in its entirety ; for in cloud and sea there is an incessant and intricate changefulness defiant alike of painter and poet ; but he could give a representation of it which, though not literally true, would yet in another sense *be* true, for nothing that appeared in his picture would be out of harmony with natural truth so long as it was in itself guiltless of disrelation in its parts.

And now what would the photographer give us of the same scene ? In far less time than an artist's briefest sketch would occupy, we would have a representation of the sea, of the clouds, of the ships and fishing craft, of the cliffs and the cliff-formations. But in what condition ? We see the cliffs clearly portrayed—even the gorges are recognisable ; but to make up for this one truth the rest of the representation is falsehood. The sea is a white blank, waveless, glitterless, unbuoyant ; the sky is pale and hueless, with dull, slate-coloured clouds, the whole seeming more as if permeated with wan moonlight than the glory of noonday ; the blue film of the steamer's smoke is a dingy gray, and the vessel itself a black smudge, while the red sails of the fishing boats are dark and shadowless. This is what the photograph would be if a representation of the cliffs were specially desired ; and the result *as a whole* would be equally unsatisfactory if only the sea and cloud effects had been wished. In this case the photographic copy would be more accurate than the sketch in retaining the actual formation

of the clouds, and would also give the delicate shading beautifully, and would moreover represent well the glitter of the sea; but this would be at the sacrifice of the other constituent parts of the picture, for the vessels would be mere blotches and the cliffs irreconisable as chalk steeps or anything else under the sun. In the first instance, in order to obtain the transference of the solid objects in the distance, the negative would have to be so long exposed to the actinic rays that decomposition would affect the more delicate sea and cloud impressions, resulting in non-gradation, and finally in a mere uniform flatness: and in the second, so very short a time would the negative have to be exposed in order to obtain true portraitures of passing cloud and sea-glitter that the cliffs and farther vessels would be left quite or almost blank. Of course, a series of photographed facts taken simultaneously, some with the negative exposed but for a very brief space, some for a sufficient time to obtain medium effects, and some so as to adequately represent the most solid objects, would produce a great many truths—in the main, might produce as many truths with more literal accuracy than any painting. But, apart from the impracticableness of this method of obtaining truth from nature, the series of photographs could never really bring before the mental vision of the spectator the scene with anything like the in one sense inaccurate and exaggerated delineation of the painter; for though an artist might be able to paint a true and beautiful painting from these photographic facts, it would entail too great an intellectual effort on the part of any one not an artist, unless indeed his or her observant powers were highly developed, both naturally and by ceaseless usage,

to comprehend the scene in its fitness of detail; and certainly the work of the landscapist is to convey a speedy impression to the onlooker of some beautiful or truthful natural scene, and not to set before him what would mainly entail a difficult labour of comprehension. Fifty artists sketching simultaneously from the same scene, each devoting the few minutes available to its ever-changing aspects, would doubtless give us an invaluable series of truthful effects; nevertheless we would get a far better idea of the scene through the literally inaccurate but harmonious rendering in the complete picture of one artist. However commonly we see people purchasing and even preferring photographs of scenery to paintings or water-colours or sketches, the enormous disadvantages of the artificial compared with the artistic method in rendering recognisable aspects are easily proved. Show a photograph of Snowdon, or Ben Lomond, or Hartfell, to some people without mentioning the mountain in question, and it is doubtful if more than one in half a dozen would really recognise it even if well acquainted with the neighbourhood; but show a sketch in water-colour, or painting in oil, and though the mountain's features may be exaggerated, the foreground of moor or woodland filled in in the studio, and an unusual effect of sunrise, noon-glow, or sunset be over all, yet few who have once seen them would fail at once to recognise Hartfell, Snowdon, or Ben Lomond. And this fact arises from an apparent contradiction, namely, that nature as accurately delineated by photography is *less* truthful in the effect it produces than any good artistic representation—*because* any given natural aspect appeals not only to the sense of sight, to the mere faculties of recognition, but also,

and most potently, to the imagination. The imagination does not want mere imitation, it can reduplicate sufficiently itself; what it craves is a powerful impression upon which to employ itself. But there are many persons who do not realise this—hence the common dislike to much of our most powerful modern etching, and the use of the detracting term *impressionist*. Mr. Hamerton stated the matter concisely in *The Portfolio* (September 1878) in criticising the remarks of an American critic who condemned Turner's Venetian pictures on the ground of their not being imitations of nature: "*The question is not whether they are close imitations of nature, but whether they have the art power of conveying a profound impression, and that they unquestionably have.*" Mr. Hamerton has also ably touched upon this necessity of exaggeration in land or sea scape art in his deeply interesting volume *Thoughts about Art*, where he also recognises what is doubtless as indubitable a fact, an equal necessity in literature dealing as in fiction and dramatic poetry with character. I think Mr. Hamerton is right in believing in this equal necessity, but only I think to a certain degree, and not to the extent he specifies, "that no study of human character would ever be generally recognised as true which was not idealised and exaggerated almost to the verge of caricature." And speaking of this very irrerecognisable photographic as compared with artistic representation, let the reader look at any photograph of some mountain with which he is familiar, and observe how dwarfed it seems to him, how devoid of all glory and majesty, how different from the sympathetic and imaginative work (*i.e.* poetic insight, artistic grasp) of the artist. This, of course, is very much more noticeable

in the case of photographs of English and Scotch hills than of the Alps, where *height* alone is sufficient to captivate the imagination in portraiture; but, as Wordsworth has pointed out, and as any observant lover of mountain scenery fully realises, mere height in itself is not alone what gives rise to emotions of grandeur and majesty, but the shadows of clouds passing overhead, the drifting of mists from crag to crag, the "mountain gloom" and "mountain glory;" therefore when these natural garments of the hills are not represented, or represented poorly and falsely, the results are unsatisfactory in the extreme, and the hill-range we love is metamorphosed into a dull brown band, and the moss-cragged, fir-sloped, ravined, and bouldered majesty of Helvellyn or Schehallion changed to a dark and dreary mass.

The processes of photography being then so different from the method of painters, it can be seen how absurd was the charge made against the Preraphaelites which Mr. Ruskin dissipated by his challenge, and how inaccurate is the frequent remark that such and such a painting is merely a coloured photograph. So foreign is both process and result of one from the other that the accusation brought then and still brought against certain artists of painting much of the detail of their pictures *from* photographs instead of direct from nature (a subsequent modification of the original charge) is quite untenable in the sense of detraction; for supposing an artist desirous of painting an old dismantled castle wall, half covered over with ivy, with wallflowers peeping out of the chinks and crannies and long grasses waving over ruined buttresses, and only having time or opportunity to make a brief sketch, he



would doubtless obtain considerable help from a photograph faithfully reproducing the old wall with all its wallflowered interstices and waving grasses, and with the exact configurations of the ivy tendrils; on these data he could regulate his *drawing*, but what would they give him of what is most essential to a painter—colour? He would have to paint the various shades of gray of the castle wall, here green with one kind of moss, here brown with another—the wall-flowers in their brown, rusty, and golden-yellow hues, the gray-green of the grasses, some seeded and almost purple—the light and shade of passing clouds—and the over-arching azure sky. This he would have to do *himself*; in what sense, then, could it be said that he was not a true painter but only a photograph-copyist? “*All good painting, however literal, however Preraphaelite or topographic, is full of human feeling and emotion. If it has no other feeling in it than love or admiration for the place depicted, that is much already, quite enough to carry the picture out of the range of photography into the regions of art.*”<sup>1</sup>

Both Preraphaelite and synthetic painters can agree on one point, viz: that the fountain-head of nature is the only legitimate spring wherefrom to draw inspiration; but this agreement means little when both differ as to methods of interpretation. The analytic, the Preraphaelite artist would consider fidelity to fact essential to the highest and truest art; the synthetic would consider the individual interpretation and representation of fact superior to mere literalness. There can be no doubt that truth absolute dwells with

<sup>1</sup> *Thoughts about Art*, page 63. The essential differences are fully gone into in this instructive volume.

neither side *in extremis*; the pure analyst is as one who triumphs in the flesh but sins in the spirit—the pure synthetist as one who succeeds in the spirit but misses unity because of being insensible to “the value and significance of flesh.” Undoubtedly the ideal painter is he who accepts the broad view of things in their relation to surroundings, who sees synthetically, but who at the same time can value and practise detail and elaborate finish when advisable, true to the facts of nature, true also to these facts as seen through the veil of individual impression. Now, while it is true the Preraphaelite painters had a tendency to be analytic before all things, *all* had not this tendency in like degree; and, moreover, if Preraphaelitism is to be judged by its chief exponents it will be seen to be primarily a protest, and not in itself a fixed creed. That Rossetti was a Preraphaelite leader is well-known, but to say he was a painter who adhered to literality above all things would be absurd—for there has been no artist in our generation who had or has a more marked and wonderful gift of infusing his work with a poetic, a supernatural in the sense of ordinarily natural, idea. Even the *Quarterly Review*, in its bitter disparagement of Preraphaelitism, speaks more respectfully of Rossetti. “With him,” it says, “however, it was realism no longer, and though it perhaps retained a more archaic treatment and distribution than was usual with other painters, it was never the slave of material, but appealed by mental images rather than by the rigid imitation of facts. . . . The poetic idea, rather than the mechanical execution, is the leading object of the work.” The *Athenæum*, which from the first recognised the exceptional gifts of the

great artist, said in the same year (1873): "Exuberance in power, exuberance of poetry of a rich order, noble technical gifts, vigour of conception, and a marvellously extensive range of thought and invention, appear in nearly everything which Mr. Rossetti produces."

There is a manifest difficulty in avoiding misunderstanding when speaking of Preraphaelitism at this late date, in the fact that in the first place there is now no artistic body of painters who can be separately classed under the term; and, in the second, that the word "Preraphaelite" in public usage has come to signify something derogatory. When at exhibitions visitors see a picture which is simply an absolutely unindividual soulless imitation of nature, or a figure-painting remarkable only for total absence of grace of outline and of harmonic gradation in colour, or an allegoric subject represented in quaint gestures and archaic habiliments, it is at once half-amusedly, half-scornfully passed by as "Preraphaelite." Without any doubt, the amusement (and sadness) and scorn are in nine such cases out of ten deserved, but the calling such a picture Preraphaelite is quite a mistake. It is true that travesty often flaunts itself under the guise of its original, but, like the ass who donned the lion's skin, it does not succeed in deceiving any but the ignorant. When Mr. Horatio Grub writes an epic in twelve books on The Deluge, and is praised by the *Ballyrashoon Reporter* or the *Straw-cum-Muddle Weekly Post* as the producer of a poem Miltonic in diction and Dantesque in force, no one but of the same intellectual vigour as Mr. Grub and the *Reporter* and *Post* reviewers is deceived; the professional critic and

the lover of poetry alike knowing how utterly out of place such terms of comparison are. It is the same with Preraphaelitism. Those who know what the characteristics of the "Brotherhood" were, both in aim and accomplishment, would not make such a mistake as the visitors just mentioned. It is true that amongst these characteristics one of our leading art writers, Mr. Hamerton, specifies an "absolute indifference to grace, and size, and majesty," a statement which I think would have more truth in it if the word "absolute" were omitted. It was not so much conscious and voluntary indifference the "P.R.B." were guilty of, as a ruthless naturalness that at times blinded their artistic vision.

One of the most brilliant of the French critics who noticed the Preraphaelite movement in England was M. Prosper Mérimée, who, however, begins with a mistake in his essay on *Les Beaux-Arts en Angleterre*, by attributing the rise of Preraphaelitism to Ruskin—"A la faveur d'un style bizarre parfois jusqu'à l'extravagance mais toujours spirituel, il a mis en circulation quelques idées saines et même pratiques"—not distinguishing that Ruskin was a champion, not an originator. M. Mérimée considers that all the defects of the young school, thoroughly analysed, reduce themselves to one—inexperience. The partial way in which he grasped the real state of affairs will be seen in the following extract, where, having explained that the Preraphaelites proposed to follow Van Eyck, Memmeling, Masaccio, and Giotto as masters, he goes on to say that these were for them "*les grands peintres après lesquels la decadence a commencé. L'imitation exacte de la Nature, tel est le mot d'ordre des novateurs.*"

*Si vous faites un portrait, ce n'est point assez, vous diront-ils, de bien copier la figure et l'expression de votre modèle ; vous devez encore copier tout aussi fidèlement ses bottes, et si elles sont ressemblées, vous aurez soin de marquer ce travail du cordonnier. Sous ce rapport, la nouvelle école anglaise ressemble à celles de nos réalistes ne s'entendraient que sur un point : c'est à renier presque tous leur devanciers. Les réalistes sont venus protester contre les habitudes académiques, contre les poses de théâtre, les sujets tirés de la mythologie, l'imitation de la statuaire antique. Ils ont voulu prendre la nature sur le fait et l'ont trouvée chez les commissionnaires du coin de leur rue. En Angleterre, il n'y avait ni académie ni mythologie à combattre. Jamais on n'y avait connu la peinture qu'on nomme classique. La seule convention qui fût à renverser c'était un coloris d'atelier, une méthode de barbouillage. Il faut remarquer encore que c'est à l'instigation des littérateurs que les Préraphaélites ont levé leur étandard, tandis que nos réalistes sont des artistes qui se révoltent contre les jugemens des gens de lettres." He goes on to complain that the Preraphaelites repudiate as false all the "artifices," selection, effect, etc., which had been studied and admired in the great masters ; that they must have the whole truth or absolutely surrender to the untranslatability of natural truth ; their dictum being, all the eye sees must be faithfully reproduced. Can nature err ? neither can the artist who copies nature faithfully.*

But M. Mérimée fully recognises the benefits almost certain to be the outcome of the protest represented by the new school, stating that one thing remains from the Preraphaelite movement which is

probably of greater value than any pictorial achievements it can show, namely, the remodelling of the system of study in England; for at last design is given an important place, which henceforth will give a solid base to artistic education.

Another well-known French critic, M. Eugène Forgues, speaking of the Preraphaelites, *ces fiers revendicateurs de l'indépendance individuelle*, having found *un évangile dans l'œuvre singulière du paysagiste de Turner, et un prophète dans la personne de M. J. Ruskin*, styles them *ces mormons de la peinture*. Perhaps the best way to state the most evident fault of the P.R.B. at the early stage of the movement would be to say that they, individually more or less, lacked the faculty of selection in details. If "Eve being tempted in the Garden of Eden" were the subject in hand, a painter like the Preraphaelite Millais (not the Millais of to-day) would say to himself "In Reality is Truth, therefore I must make my picture real; I will paint my own, or Hunt's, or Rossetti's garden with literal exactness, since I cannot paint with literal exactness the Garden of Eden; for the serpent I shall paint a boa-constrictor from the Zoological Gardens, so as not to be misled by any false idealisation of the Biblical serpent; for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the first apple-tree I come across, and for the fruit thereof the first apple I pluck. So-and-so is the most beautiful model I know, therefore she shall be my 'Eve;' it does not matter that she is quite unlike what most imaginative artists would conceive Eve as more or less resembling—it is better to paint 'So-and-so' with literal exactness than an ideal portraiture not absolutely true to nature." The

fault in such a painter's determination would not be in the choice of subject, which is a fine one, nor in painting the actual detail of a serpent's exterior from the life, which would be the true and only fit way to do ; but the fault would lie in the want of discrimination in selecting an ordinary garden to represent what really represented the fulness of the whole earth, or, in the most restricted sense, a very different scene from any English garden—in selecting the first tree that came to hand, as likely as not one unfitted for pictorial effect, unpicturesque, mean, and barren in appearance—and in painting the symbolic fruit of the paradisiacal account as an ordinarily wrinkled eating-apple. This want of fit selection does not, however, necessarily postulate want of poetic feeling, for a strong poetic bias is manifest in most of the early Pre-raphaelite work ; it is simply the unfortunate predominance of a mistaken idea of truth. A lately deceased eminent painter—Mr. Samuel Palmer—made the best definition of natural truth in art when he said—“ Truth in art seems to me to stand at a fixed centre, midway between its two antagonists—*Fact and Phantasm.*”<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the “ Brotherhood ” were remarkable for strength of purpose, for intellectual power, high moral fervour, and quite unexampled manipulative skill. Their primary aims were to choose in the first instance high subjects fit for art, and in the next to treat these subjects with the utmost analytic detail and absolute faithfulness to truth ; to accept nature as the only reliable guide, and have

✓ <sup>1</sup> Vide Mr. L. R. Valpy's Account of Mr. Palmer's Series of Drawings (*Fine Art Society*, 1881).

nothing to do with tradition. What such an ideal means, any artist can realise—the high mental powers requisite, the enormous labour of hand, the keenly observant eye, faculties for the most laborious analysis, intense conviction and marvellous patience. That the Preraphaelites were thus gifted there can now be surely no dispute, and that they fulfilled a purpose and influenced the artistic spirit at large there can equally be no doubt.

The Preraphaelite movement, though in itself mainly devotional or appertaining to what is called high art, was in reality the outcome of the spirit working in art that was already working in the world of thought—it was essentially a sceptical revolt. The investigations of scientists had led them to conclusions antagonistic to accepted dogmas, even to Biblical declarations, and the scientific mind was in revolt against the clerical conception of the creation, the flood, the lapse of geologic periods, and so forth; the labours of the literary philosopher had resulted in speculative theories, more or less convincingly backed-up, in direct opposition to orthodox creeds, and these theories, whether religious or social, and having first joined hands with the scientific deductions, had permeated all classes; and at last the artistic minds of a select few, catching fire from the sceptical (that is, “examining”) spirit abroad, banded together for the purpose of animating what they considered a dying English art by revolting against tradition and bringing all the powers of intellect and laborious manual analysis, as opposed to a slovenly uninspired synthesis, to bear upon whatever they undertook. Looking back, these artist-sceptics saw that the band of earnest truth-



loving workers who preceded Raphael resembled them in this, an absolute reliance on nature; and hence they likened themselves to, and called themselves, the *Preraphaelite Brotherhood*.

Their convictions were assured, their energy unique, their enthusiasm intense—therefore it is not to be wondered at that, intellectually dowered as they moreover were, they in several instances turned also to literature not only as another means of advancing their doctrines, but as itself a somewhat fouled stream they would fain refresh with pure and original springs. And amongst them the intellectual bias was as strongly marked as the artistic, the public proof being that out of the original seven promoters of the movement three have subsequently made their names in literature.

A Protestant, a protester, belonging nearly always to an extreme minority, is inevitably disliked—sometimes feared, but always disliked; and though nearly every good law we possess, our individual, our social, our religious, our moral freedom, is owing to protest after protest, the theory of the beneficent action of protestation is only admitted *in* theory and as only praiseworthy in the past. Yet let the protesting spirit die out of our midst, and the result will be first stagnation, and then retrogression. The craving human spirit, whether manifested in religion, or politics, or the life social, whether in the peasant who craves for his small right to the soil of his fatherland or the artisan who demands manhood suffrage, in the merchant who would fain extend commercial enterprise still further, and in the politician who labours for a republic or a constitution, in the poet, the musician, and the artist—

everywhere and with ever-recurring insistence this craving human spirit must ask, ask, ask. It is therefore that Preraphaelitism, even if it possessed no other virtue than that of protestation, served a good purpose in art; and if it be true, as it is, that the term no longer embraces a specific body of artists, none the less the influence of the protest was not impotent, but has borne good and lasting fruit. That, practically, the spirit that animated the Brotherhood had for its main aim *to protest* is made apparent in the fact that after the coherent energy necessary for protestation had been expended, the individualism of each artist showed itself by gliding into separate if parallel grooves, and ultimately, as in the case of Millais, into grooves widely apart. To the one principle that above all at heart inspired the young artist, the infusion of an essentially poetic idea into all artistic composition, Rossetti has been throughout the most consistent as Millais has been the least. As the last great painter, for a great painter beyond all doubt Mr. Millais is, shook off the defects that marked him during his Preraphaelite period, there came a time of uncertainty, of hesitancy, in his work. When this "relapse" was over, Mr. Millais' convalescent art no longer resembled that of the Brotherhood; and in the eyes of most, of an overwhelming majority, the change was considered a cause of devout thanksgiving. That Mr. Millais as a synthetist is a greater *painter* than he was as an analyst, a Preraphaelite, is doubtless true; his touch has become surer and more facile, his colour more harmonious, and his choice of subject wholly or almost wholly contemporary; yet there are some who miss the old inspiration, the old earnestness—who look for

the animating high conception, the animating poetic idea, and look in vain. If it be true that it is sufficient for an artist to be nothing beyond a consummate *painter*, then I suppose it is better for art as it is as regards Mr. Millais; but *is* it true? There are some at least who do not think so, who do not thus regard art.

But Dante Rossetti, the most poetic of the Brotherhood as he was from the first, has consistently with each picture united a poetic idea; so truly so, that it may well be doubted if in the history of art there is any more marked example of a "poet on canvas," and to such an extent that there is a certain element of truth in the remark of an American critic:<sup>1</sup>—"It will always be a question, we think, whether Mr. Rossetti had not better have painted his poems and written his pictures; there is so much that is purely sensuous in the former and so much that is intellectual in the latter."

I have not unfrequently heard the opinion expressed that in his choice of archaic subjects Rossetti was a Preraphaelite; but as a matter of fact there is no necessary connection between archaism and Preraphaelitism. And it must be remembered that if Preraphaelitism be taken as mere Imitativeness, then no more un-Preraphaelite painter ever lived than Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Indeed, he disliked the term very much latterly, because he knew that it had a false significance to the outside world—and, in this outside signification, was quite inapplicable to himself. In the best sense of the term he was a Preraphaelite,

<sup>1</sup> Mr. W. D. Howells, in an (unsigned) review of the *Poems* in the *Atlantic Monthly* for July 1870.

and in none other, in the main; and it will not be out of place to recall here the now well-known anecdote that, when asked by a lady one evening at a friend's house (that of Dr. Westland Marston) if he were the "Preraphaelite Rossetti," he replied, "Madam, I am not an 'ite' of any kind; I am only a painter."<sup>1</sup>

The *Saturday Review*, in 1858, writes of Mr. Morris as the leading or representative Preraphaelite poet. But what is Preraphaelitism in poetry? The name is surely an entire misnomer here. If by Preraphaelitism in painting we understand the principle of unartificial, anti-classic, and purely natural work, and by Preraphaelitism in poetry mean the same thing, we would have to designate such different and time-separated poets as Chaucer, Cowper, Crabbe, Wordsworth, Burns, and Tennyson as Preraphaelites, which would be a manifestly absurd and incongruous use of the term. One writer,<sup>2</sup> indeed, does actually speak of Chaucer as being the representative of Preraphaelitism in English verse, and again of Cowper and Wordsworth awakening it (*sic*?) in England, and Burns in Scotland; but the

<sup>1</sup> "Of the whilome leaders of Preraphaelitism Mr. Dante Rossetti is perhaps the only one who combines in just balance the passion for beauty with intellectual subtlety and executive mastery. And the name of this painter brings us from the realistic, didactic part of the sequel of Preraphaelitism . . . to the art whose aim is beauty. . . . Of the original Preraphaelite brethren, Mr. Rossetti, perhaps the chief intellectual force in the movement, is the only one who seems thoroughly to have combined beauty with passion and intellect. An amazing power of realisation and extreme splendour of colour are used to embody subjects symbolically suggestive, and pregnant of fanciful allegory."—Prof. Sidney Colvin, *English Painters and Painting in 1867*.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Gerald Massey, in his second lecture on Preraphaelitism in Painting and Poetry, delivered in Edinburgh 17th March 1858.

complete irrelevancy of the term in such instances must be apparent to any one who understands its true signification. Burns was not a protester, he was a singer; and to speak of Chaucer as a Preraphaelite bears on the face of it its own refutation. The fact of the case is that the term is now *never* used in poetry to designate natural non-artificial work, and that if another Wordsworth were to appear it would be the very last term used in speaking of his work; when used at all, which it should not be, it is only to signify some affectation of quaintness or grotesqueness, or some archaic choice of subject. Thus, taking Rossetti's poems as an example, we find that *The Blessèd Damozel* is called Preraphaelite while *The King's Tragedy* is not; but if there is any meaning in the term as applied to poetry, the application should be *vice versâ*. But there is no meaning, poetically speaking, in the term, therefore to call *The King's Tragedy* a Preraphaelite ballad would be absurd. In whatever sense the word may be used, whether as signifying archaism or naturalism, it would be a good thing if it now dropped for good from the critical category.

The whole subject of Preraphaelitism has been greatly misunderstood, sometimes ludicrously so, as in the case of a "critic" in the *North American Review* (for October 1870) who, referring to the absurd story of the affectation of the P.R.B. in pronouncing the name of their magazine, *The Germ*, with a hard *g*, adds, "*there is nothing in this procedure which is essentially inconsistent with the characteristics of the works which Preraphaelitic art has produced!*" Preraphaelitism, as the principle of a sect, is now a thing of the past: but let it be remembered for its beneficent influence and

deeds, as well as for its faults and later backslidings in disciples who never attained the platform in art of the original Brotherhood. For when the protest was accomplished and had borne fruit, each individual member pursued his own separate and independent groove; and it was only amongst the so-called disciples that a unanimity of style and choice of subject was perpetuated. Nor should the impression, arising out of so much adverse criticism, be allowed to crystallise, the impression that adherence to Preraphaelite principles almost of necessity postulates sterility of imagination and absence of insight, however great may be the manifestation of mechanical skill—for it is not so. There is nothing in the Preraphaelite principle of "absolute, uncompromising truth" to "nature, and to nature only" to prevent any artist of necessity from accepting in spirit and following up in deed the principle set forth in Bacon's beautiful sentence in *On the Advancement of Learning* (Bk. ii.)—"The world being inferior to the soul; by reason whereof, there is agreeable to the spirit of man a more ample greatness, a more exact goodness, and a more absolute variety than can be found in the nature of things." For the animating spirit is nature as much as the permeated matter.

Having thus so far examined the aims and methods of Preraphaelitism, I shall now proceed to give an account of the famous though rare magazine wherein its principles are supposed to be embodied.

When the "Brotherhood" was formed the membership consisted of seven in number, viz. five painters,

one sculptor, and one young man who afterwards became celebrated as an acute and able critic in both art and literature. The last mentioned was William Michael Rossetti; the sculptor was Thomas Woolner; and the five painters were Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, James Collinson, and Frederick George Stephens. That the band was a specially gifted one will be evident when it is remembered that William Rossetti has shown notable poetic as well as critical gifts, that Dante Rossetti has achieved a great and enduring name in two arts, that Thomas Woolner is well known through his two fine volumes of poetry, that Mr. Collinson exhibited in his youth considerable poetic promise, and that Mr. F. G. Stephens has made his mark as an acute and eloquent art critic. I have at times come across references to several other artists as belonging to the Brotherhood, but this is a mistake; for though doubtless several more or less well-known artists might be mentioned who belonged to the *school*, no one beyond the seven enumerated was endowed with actual membership. There are three names that have more insistently than others been spoken of as "Brothers," the late Thomas Seddon, Mr. Ford Madox Brown, and Mr. William Bell Scott; but the first of these, though decidedly of the school, had no active concern in the original movement at all. Mr. W. B. Scott has been throughout his career consistent to the individualism that prevented his joining "the sacred seven;" and Mr. Ford Madox Brown, it is well known, refused membership on the ground of scepticism as to the utility of coteries of any kind. But the latter is in one sense more closely united with the Preraphaelite

body than other sympathisers, in that if Dante Rossetti be considered its father, Mr. Brown may be considered its grandfather,—for no artist had a more marked influence on the young painter of 1847 than he whose Westminster frescoes had won for him such a wide reputation; and indeed since the days of studenthood in the “forties” down to the last years of his life, Rossetti never ceased to think highly of the genius of his friend and coadjutor.

In any case the members of this new *cénacle* would probably have soon recognised the advisability of literature as a method of propagandism, but inevitably so in the fact of the literary bias being so strong as it was. Though discussed with his brother and sister in the first instance, the scheme was really born of the energetic and enthusiastic mind of Gabriel, and once resolved upon, was not long in being set afoot. So one evening in the early autumn of 1849, a small company being assembled at Rossetti’s studio in Newman Street, various plans and names were suggested; at last a title suggested by Mr. William Cave Thomas was accepted, this title being *The Germ*—one considered specially applicable to the subject. By this name the magazine was therefore first known, and subsequently has always been referred to, though of the four numbers it reached only two were issued as *The Germ*, the two later being, at the instigation of the printer (and friend), Mr. J. L. Tupper, altered to *Art and Poetry*. The three Rossettis were literally the mainstay of the new organ, a large proportion of the contents being from their pens, and William, moreover, being the editor.

This short-lived publication must always be looked



upon with a double interest, for not only is it the receptacle for the early work of men and women (or rather one woman) who have since taken "honours" in different arts, but it is also, as Mr. J. Ashcroft Noble says in his interesting paper in *Fraser's Magazine* for May, "the first, and indeed the only, official manifesto or *apologia* of Preraphaelitism." By-the-bye, I see that Mr. Noble has made a mistake in supposing the article on *The Purpose and Tendency of Early Italian Art* to be by "Mr. John Seward, another young painter;" there was no such painter, and the name was simply a temporary *nom-de-plume* of Mr. F. G. Stephens, who is also the "Laura Savage," whose name follows a paper appearing in the fourth number, entitled *Modern Giants*. The extent of the Rossetti contributions will be seen by the following figures, when it will also be seen that the main portion thereof consisted of poems. In the four numbers there are in all thirty-eight separate reviews, poems, and an allegorical art-tale, to which are attached the signatures of William, Dante, or Christina Rossetti:—

DANTE GABRIEL (then aged 21) was the author of *twelve* contributions—namely, *Hand and Soul*, five poems, and six sonnets.

WILLIAM MICHAEL (then aged 20) of *nineteen* contributions—namely, four reviews, eleven short poems, three sonnets, and the sonnet that was printed on the cover of each number.

"ELLEN ALLEYN" (Christina) (then aged 19) of *seven* contributions, all short poems.

As I have just referred, on the front page or cover of *The Germ*, in each of its four numbers, there appeared an interpretary sonnet by William Rossetti; a sonnet not indeed specially remarkable in itself, but note-

worthy for embodying the Preraphaelite principle—  
Truth the primary aim—

“ *When whoso merely hath a little thought  
Will plainly think the thought which is in him—  
Not imaging another’s bright or dim,  
Not mangling with new words what others taught ;  
When whoso speaks, from having either sought  
Or only found,—will speak, not just to skim  
A shallow surface with words made and trim,  
But in that very speech the matter brought :*

“ *Be not too keen to cry—‘ So this is all !—  
A thing I might myself have thought as well,  
But would not say it, for it was not worth !’  
Ask : ‘ Is this truth ?’ For is it still to tell  
That, be the theme a point or the whole earth,  
Truth is a circle, perfect, great or small.”*

The first number was issued in January 1850, at the price of one shilling. It was entitled *The Germ : Thoughts towards Nature in Poetry, Literature, and Art*, and contained an etching by Holman Hunt, illustrative of a scene in the opening poem. It is a double etching—that is to say, it is in two sections though on one plate ; but it must be confessed that the strength of *The Germ* by no means rests in its etchings. The lower section of this first illustrative matter is much the better, having pathos and truth without affectation. It describes the scene referred to in the following verse from the poem referred to—the *My Beautiful Lady* of Thomas Woolner :—

“ Silence seemed to start in space  
When first the bell’s harsh toll  
Rang for my lady’s soul,  
Vitality was hell ; her grace  
The shadow of a dream :  
Things then did scarcely seem :

Oblivion's stroke fell like a mace :  
As a tree that's just hewn  
I dropped, in a dead swoon,  
And lay a long time cold upon my face."

The prone figure on the new-made grave of his "Beloved Lady" is finely done, and we can almost fancy we hear the toll of the slanted bell above him as it swings in an aperture of the convent chapel, and the low *Miserere* of the nuns passing two-and-two in the background, beyond whom are the crosses and grassy mounds of the little cemetery.

*My Beautiful Lady* has since become so well-known to the public that there will be no necessity to refer to it further than to say it is given in *The Germ* only in part: the first section consisting of thirty six-line stanzas, and the second, called *Of my Lady in Death*, of twenty of ten lines each. Immediately following this poem is a sonnet (unsigned) by Ford Madox Brown, entitled *The Love of Beauty*.

Then comes the first prose paper, a dissertation that must certainly have amused, while it astounded, the orthodox artist or connoisseur of the day. It is by Mr. J. L. Tupper, and entitled *The Subject in Art*, but cannot be said to show marked literary faculty; for instance, there is one sentence that extends to between two and three hundred words without a full stop, and embraces, besides two sets of brackets and five italicised words or phrases, twenty-four dashes. It is thoughtful, it is true; but there is such an extraordinary misapplication of the thought on, for instance, the subject of "still life" that the value of the writer's other opinions is somewhat deteriorated. The first of the following short extracts will show

the Preraphaelite instinct at work, and the second the false step the author took as regards "still life" in painting:—

"Thus then we see that the antique, however successfully it may have been wrought, is not our model; for, according to that faith demanded at setting out, fine art delights us from its being the semblance of what in nature delights. Now, as the artist does not work by the instrumentality of rule and science, but mainly by an instinctive impulse, if he copy the antique, unable as he is to segregate the merely delectable matter, he must needs copy the whole, and thereby multiply models, which the casting-man can do equally well; whereas if he copy nature, with a like inability to distinguish that delectable attribute which allures him to copy her, and under the same necessity of copying the whole, to make sure of this 'tenant of nowhere;' we then have the artist, the instructed of nature, fulfilling his natural capacity, while his works we have as manifold yet various as Nature's own thoughts for her children" (page 14).

"Let us consider the merits of a subject really practical, such as 'dead game' or 'a basket of fruit;' and the first general idea such a subject will excite is simply that of *food*, 'something to eat.' For though fruit on the tree, or a pheasant in the air, is a portion of nature, and properly belongs to the section 'Landscape,' a division of art intellectual enough; yet gather the fruit or bring down the pheasant, and you presently bring down the poetry with it; and although Sterne could sentimentalise upon a dead ass; and although a dead pheasant in the larder, or a dead sheep at a butchers, may excite feelings akin to anything but

good living ; and though they may *there* be the excitive causes of poetical, nay, of moral reflection ; yet see them on the canvas, and the first and uppermost idea will be that of '*food*,' and how, in the name of decency, they ever came there. It will be vain to argue that gathered fruit is only nature under a certain phase, and that a dead sheep or a dead pheasant is only a dead animal like a dead ass ; it will be pitiaibly vain and miserable sophistry, since we know that the dead pheasant in a picture will always be as *food*, while the same at the poulterer's will be but a dead pheasant" (pp. 15-16).

I am afraid most people will continue to be "pitiaibly vain and miserable sophists," believing the "food idea" more readily brought to mind by the poulterer's shop than the painted canvas—who will continue to prefer, for ocular purposes, their fruit as seen in Lance to the same as exhibited in the green-grocer's window.

After *The Subject in Art* follows a short poem in three verses, entitled *The Seasons*. It was written by Coventry Patmore, but bears no special mark of the school ; and was subsequently reprinted in Mr. Patmore's collected works. *Dream Land* succeeds *The Seasons*—that exquisite lyric by Christina Rossetti, which is known to hundreds in America and England. Facing it is the *My Sister's Sleep* by her brother Gabriel, under the sub-title *Songs of One Household*. It is different, through subsequent omissions and alterations, from the version that is generally known, but the poem itself and these alterations will be found treated in detail in Chapter V. of this book. As to the famous and beautiful allegoric narrative, *Hand and Soul*, I have

already referred to one or two passages in it in Chapter I., passages specially bearing upon the writer's individuality; but it will be found discussed at greater length in Chapter IV., amongst Rossetti's prose writings. The long review of Arthur Hugh Clough's *Bothie of Toper-na-Fuosich* (Vuolich) that follows is distinguished by a marked critical faculty, all the more noticeable from the fact of the unpopularity the poem met with at the time. It probably did not influence the sale of a single copy out the "circle," for the circulation of *The Germ* was extremely limited, the magazine being almost quite unnoticed by the press; but it gave great gratification to the author, and showed him and a few others that the seeing eye of the critical fraternity was not entirely obscured. The next contribution is also by William Rossetti, a thoughtful sonnet entitled *Her First Season*; and this is followed by some verses by J. L. Tupper, called *A Sketch from Nature*, showing a quick eye for natural colour. The number concludes with the lyric *An End*, by Christina Rossetti, verses full of the exquisite dreaminess that pervades so much of her work.

In February the second number was issued, with, for frontispiece, an etching by James Collinson, illustrative of some lines in his poem on the *Five Sorrowful Mysteries*. Below it are the words *Ex ore infantium et lactentium perfecisti laudem*. In the right of the etching Nazareth crowns a low hill, and below it, on a shoreward slope, are one or two cottages; in the background and to the left the cliffs break down to the quiescent Sea of Galilee, and on the lake's margin is a group of quaint solemn children in the midst of whom sits the young Christ crowned by his companions with

a wreath of flowers. The absolute sincerity of the etcher is unmistakable, but the work itself is too "Fra Angelesque" to suit contemporary taste, save the false taste of the ultra-æstheticists. The poem itself, called *The Child Jesus: A Record typical of the Five Sorrowful Mysteries*, is of considerable length, being in five parts extending in all to about 330 lines; the five parts, or "sorrowful mysteries," being respectively The Agony in the Garden, The Scourging, The Crowning with Thorns, Jesus carrying His Cross, and The Crucifixion. There is much that is really fine in this poem, its chief charm, perhaps, being the earnest simplicity that is manifest in it throughout; but now and again there are very striking lines, such as the following, wherein Mary relating a dream describes an electric glimmer, antecedent of storm, shining at night upon a sterile and desolate waste:—

"darkness closed round me.

(Thy father said it thundered towards the morn.)

But soon, far off, I saw a dull green light

Break through the clouds, which fell across the earth,

Like death upon a bad man's upturned face."

The five sorrows are not, as their titles would seem to signify, the actual five agonies of Christ as chronicled in the New Testament, but are prophetic foreshadowings of these events seen in childhood. Thus the Agony in the Garden is the grief of the child Jesus over the sudden violent death of a fledgling dove he had been watching learning flight from its mother, for in the midst of the latter's solicitude and hovering care a hawk swoops down and, killing the young bird with its talons, carries it to a cleft in the rocks savagely

tearing and devouring it. All the rest of that day  
Jesus sat in the garden and wept,

“Sad, as with broken hints of a lost dream,  
Or dim foreboding of some future ill.”

The second sorrow, the Scourging, is when the young Christ sees, one afternoon, two young men goading and lashing an overburdened yearling ass; the patient pathetic look of the animal goes to his heart, and a sudden strange grief comes upon him as his eye catches sight of the natural cross marked on every ass—so deep and foreknowing that Mary “remembered it in days that came.” The poem throughout is eminently pictorial, and nowhere more so than in this second part. The first twenty lines make an exquisite picture, such as pre-eminently would have suited the genius of Rossetti at the time he painted *The Girlhood of the Virgin*, the child sitting at his mother’s feet in the open air outside their cottage, with the fretted light breaking through vine-leaves falling upon him, and on his naked foot, shining in the warm glow of the sun, a newly alighted moth with “blue-eyed scarlet wings spread out”—sometimes listening to her, with little hands crossed and tightly clasped around her knee, sometimes lost in thought when seeming only to be watching “the orange-belted wild bees” coming and going from “their waxen-vaulted cells in a hazel-covered crag aloft.”

The Crowning with Thorns is emblematised in the children offering young Jesus a reed for a sceptre and a wreath of hawthorn flowers; a scene that is more beautifully delineated in verse than in the etching which illustrates it. The agony of bearing the cross



is foreshadowed in the fourth part, wherein Jesus would fain help to bear the burden of Joseph, carrying a heavy log of felled wood from the shore, but the old man tells him he is yet too young, but will ere long be strong enough to bear on his shoulders even such a tree—

“Then Jesus lifted deep prophetic eyes  
Full in the old man’s face, but nothing said.”

The fifth sorrow, the Crucifixion, is prophetically preluded in the beautiful story of the little lamb beloved of the young child, and which Mary saw in a dream fallen into a deep pit choked with briars and thorns, many having torn its head and bleeding feet, and one having pierced its side from which flowed blood and water.

I have dwelt specially upon this poetic production of Mr. Collinson, not only because of its intrinsic merit or being the only work of its kind by him with which I am acquainted, as because it never seems to me to have got its due meed of praise from critics, public or private.<sup>1</sup>

It is followed by a short poem, *A Pause of Thought*, by Christina Rossetti, which is succeeded by an interesting, from a Preraphaelite inquiry point of view, paper on *The Purpose and Tendency of Early Italian Art*. It is given forth as by John Seward, but, as I have already had occasion to explain, this was simply one of the pseudonyms of Frederick G. Stephens. The author at once strikes the Preraphaelite keynote, the article opening thus:—“The object we have proposed

<sup>1</sup> To this I must except the brief reference of Mr. J. Ashcroft Noble in *Fraser’s Magazine* for June 1882, who speaks of the beauty of the poem being “at once severe, pensive, and solemn.”

to ourselves in writing on Art has been 'an endeavour to encourage and enforce an entire adherence to the simplicity of nature; and also to direct attention, as an auxiliary medium, to the comparatively few works which Art has yet produced in this spirit.' It is in accordance with the former and more prominent of these objects that the writer proposes at present to treat."

Further on, he proceeds to say: "It has been said that there is a presumption in this movement of the modern school, a want of deference to established authorities, a removing of ancient landmarks. This is best answered by the profession that nothing can be more humble than the pretension to the observation of facts alone, and the truthful rendering of them. If we are not to depart from established principles how are we to advance at all? . . . That this movement is an advance and that it is of Nature herself, is shown by its going nearer to truth in every object produced, and by its being guided by the very principles the ancient painters followed, as soon as they attained the mere power of representing an object faithfully. These principles are now revived, not from them, though through their example, but from Nature herself." He then goes on to a defence of the early Italian painters, *à propos* of the modern Preraphaelites; taking up the cudgels manfully for the then much ridiculed gauntness and quaintness of so much of the work of the early Italians, saying: "A certain gaunt length and slenderness have also been commented upon most severely; as if the Italians of the fourteenth century were as so many dry horses, and the artists were blamed for not following his model. The consequence of this direction of

taste is that we have lifeguardsmen and pugilists taken as models for kings, gentlemen, and philosophers. The writer was once in a studio where a man six feet two inches in height, with Atlantean shoulders, was sitting for King Alfred. That there is no greater absurdity than this will be perceived by any one that has ever read the description of the person of the king given by his historian and friend Asser." The remainder of the paper is occupied with an ardent eulogy of the early Italians, a philosophic reference to the transient and deceptive glory of the kind of "Indian summer" that we often see in the art of generations or nations before ultimate decadence, and insistence on truth in every particular being the aim of the artist, natural truth alone, moreover, being sufficient. Purity of heart, he declares, is above all necessary to him who has entered upon the new era. The spirit of willing sacrifice rather than that of yielding to the conventional or degraded prevailing taste, and of working in humility and truth; but above all, purity of heart, freedom from the vice of sensuality of the mind.

If narrow in its comprehensiveness this paper is at least earnest and praiseworthy, and full of the divine spirit of protest.

Succeeding it are four poetical contributions. The first consists of two exquisite little verses by Christina Rossetti; the second, a poem of about 130 lines in length, by William Bell Scott, entitled *Morning Sleep*,<sup>1</sup> contains some characteristically fine passages, such as this, where the poet drowsily watches from his bed

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in the edition of 1854, and afterwards with some slight alterations in the collated edition.

the growing day, remembering at the same time how that same day is even then dying in the Orient :—

“ And now the gradual sun begins to throw  
 Its slanting glory on the heads of trees,  
 And every bird stirs in its nest revealed,  
 And shakes its dewy wings. . . .  
 . . . To an Eastern vale  
 That light may now be waning, and across  
 The tall reeds by the Ganges, lotus-paved,  
 Lengthening the shadows of the banyan-tree.  
 The rice-fields are all silent in the glow,  
 All silent the deep heaven without a cloud,  
 Burning like molten gold. A red canoe  
 Crosses with fan-like paddles and the sound  
 Of feminine song, freighted with great-eyed maids  
 Whose unzoned bosoms swell on the rich air ;  
 A lamp is in each hand ; some mystic rite  
 Go they to try.”

The third of these contributions is a sonnet by Calder Campbell, and the fourth some dialogue verses by Coventry Patmore, entitled *Stars and Moon*.

Mr. Ford Madox Brown next contributes the first part (entitled *The Design*) of a dissertation *On the Mechanism of a Historical Picture* ; but as *The Germ* came to an end before the second or remaining parts saw the light, it can only be considered as a fragment. It is written in a moderate spirit, and is addressed mainly to those about to paint their first historical composition ; and here also the Preraphaelite keynote is speedily stricken, in the words advising a different procedure from the false, feebly synthetic, “ historic ” art then prevalent. “ The first care of the painter, after having selected his subject, should be to make himself thoroughly acquainted with the character of the times and habits of the people which he is

about to represent ; and next, to consult the proper authorities for his costume, and such objects as may fill his canvas, as the architecture, furniture, vegetation, or landscape, or accessories, necessary to the elucidation of the subject."

The succeeding contribution is a poem called *A Testimony*, unsigned, but which readers of Christina Rossetti will at once recall by the opening line, *I said of laughter : It is vain*. The following two verses, entitled *O When and Where*, are by Mr. Woolner.

This second part of *The Germ* shows pre-eminently how strong was the poetic element in its supporters. Already I have mentioned in it Mr. Collinson's long poem, four sets of verses by Christina Rossetti, Mr. W. Bell Scott's *Morning Sleep*, a sonnet by Calder Campbell, and dialogue verses by Coventry Patmore ; and before the review with which the part concludes there are still notable poetic productions to consider. These are the four short poems called together *Fancies at Leisure*, by William Rossetti ; three sonnets, entitled *The Sight Beyond*, by W. H. Deverell ; and the famous *Blessèd Damozel* of Dante Rossetti.

The *Fancies at Leisure* are respectively *Noon Rest*, *A Quiet Place*, *A Fall of Rain*, and *Sheer Waste*, and are remarkable as showing a keen eye for nature, an instinctive grasping of the inner significance of any scene or landscape. There is at times too marked an insistence of what may be called Wordsworthian simplicity,—as, for instance, in the second and fourth verses of the fourth of the *Fancies* ; but they have the one real *raison d'être*, that of their conception being impulsive, spontaneous, not wrought out with laborious choice of detail like so much of our recent verse, which is so

often very artistic and so seldom truly poetic. *Sheer Waste* is the longest of the four, and has for its keynote the same thought that found expression in the *Empedocles* of Matthew Arnold—

“Is it so small a thing  
To have lived light in the sun,  
To have enjoyed the spring?”

W. H. Deverell's three sonnets are in no way specially remarkable save from their interest as the work of one whose genius found vent in a different art from that of poetic composition.

*The Blessèd Damozel* differs a good deal in many minor details from the version best known to the public, and will be fully considered in its place in the fifth chapter of this book. It seems strange that a poem of this length, exhibiting so much originality and so representative of a new element in poetry, should have attracted so little notice outside of the “circle” as was the case; but it must be remembered that *The Germ* was quite unknown to the general public and almost quite unnoticed by the contemporary press.

The review of Matthew Arnold's first volume, issued as *The Strayed Reveller, and other Poems* by A., is in itself analytic and sympathetic to a high degree, but the critical faculty it shows is all the more noticeable in that it was written by a youth of nineteen, which was about the age of William Rossetti at the time of its composition. The critic, while giving due and generous praise to a first book, discriminated wisely, pointing out what are undoubted blemishes; and at times his remarks are peculiarly

felicitous, as when he speaks of the classicism pervading Mr. Arnold's poetic work, where, admitting its genuineness and alienation from that "mere superficial acquaintance with names and hackneyed attributes which was once poetry," he states that it is not the same as "that strong love which made Shelley, as it were, the heir of Plato; not that vital grasp of conception which enabled Keats without, and enables Landor with, the most intimate knowledge of form and detail, to return to and renew the old thoughts and beliefs of Greece." That this remark shows true critical insight will, I think, be evident to all who know Mr. Arnold's work.

In April the third part of the Magazine appeared, but no longer as *The Germ*, the title now being *Art and Poetry: Being Thoughts towards Nature. Conducted principally by Artists.*

The etching accompanying this number, *Cordelia's last Charge to Goneril and Regan when leaving her Father's Palace with the King of France*, is by Ford Madox Brown, but is certainly, save in its value as a design, unsuccessful as an etching;<sup>1</sup> and the verses which serve to illustrate the etching are by the editor, but are in no way noteworthy.

The contribution entitled *Macbeth* is one of the most remarkable in *The Germ*. It is an essay or rather study on a moot point in Shakespeare's tragedy, and, while its point of view is now familiar to us, it

<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it must be remembered that Mr. Madox Brown's etching was hurriedly executed for *The Germ*, having to take the place of one prepared by Dante Rossetti, but at the last minute withdrawn by him as unsatisfactory. As a Shakespearian interpreter Mr. Brown has long ere this made a wide and deserved reputation.

is notable for its originality at a time when such a view was unheard of. Its author, Mr. Coventry Patmore, states that it has been written to demonstrate the existence of a mistaken idea in the universal interpretation of the character of Macbeth, and that he can prove "that a design of illegitimately obtaining the crown of Scotland had been conceived by Macbeth, and that it had been communicated by him to his wife, prior to his first meeting with the witches, who are commonly supposed to have suggested that design." The view thus and throughout the essay unfolded is one that has been brought home to us by Henry Irving, the view that Macbeth had the idea of usurpation and murder, if need be, from the first, mentally formed or unformed, and that he was not, as Schlegel and other critics have made him out to be, a man of "many noble qualities" ruined by evil influence and suggestion.

Following on *Macbeth*, Christina Rossetti contributes under her usual pseudonym two poems, *Repining* and *Sweet Death*, the former being about two hundred and fifty lines in length, and never having been reprinted. The author has doubtless good reasons for this, so I shall only quote from it some few lines which will show the executive and imaginative power of this girl of seventeen.

" He answered not, and they went on.  
The glory of the heavens was gone ;  
The moon gleamed not nor any star ;  
Cold winds were rustling near and far,  
And from the trees the dry leaves fell  
With a sad sound unspeakable.  
The air was cold ; till from the south  
A gust blew hot, like sudden drouth,



Into their faces ; and a light  
Glowing and red, shone thro' the night.

“ A mighty city full of flame  
And death and sounds without a name.  
Amid the black and blinding smoke,  
The people, as one man, awoke.  
Oh ! happy they who yesterday  
On the long journey went away ;  
Whose pallid lips, smiling and chill,  
While the flames scorch them smile on still ;  
Who murmur not, who tremble not  
When the bier crackles fiery hot ;  
Who, dying, said in love's increase :  
' Lord, let thy servant part in peace.' ”

“ Those in the town could see and hear  
A shaded river flowing near ;  
The broad deep bed could hardly hold  
Its plenteous waters calm and cold.  
Was flame-wrapped all the city wall,  
The city gates were flame-wrapped all.

“ What was man's strength, what puissance then ?  
Women were mighty as strong men.  
Some knelt in prayer, believing still,  
Resigned unto a righteous will,  
Bowing beneath the chastening rod,  
Lost to the world, but found of God.  
Some prayed for friend, for child, for wife ;  
Some prayed for faith ; some prayed for life ;  
While some, proud even in death, hope gone,  
Steadfast and still, stood looking on.”

Next comes the second paper by J. L. Tupper on *The Subject in Art*, this time being mainly an effort to disprove “ the supposed poetical obstacles to the rendering of real life or nature in its own real garb and time, as faithfully as art can render it.” The writer puts forward some very pregnant queries which are still applicable, apart from the question of Realism

or Idealism in Art,—“Why to draw a sword we do not wear to aid an oppressed damsel, and not a purse which we do wear to rescue an erring one? Why to worship a martyred St. Agatha, and not a sick woman attending the sick? . . . Why to love a *Ladie in bower*, and not a wife’s fireside?” The paper concludes with the expressed intention to consider in detail in a future number the claims of ancient, mediæval, and modern subjects, the writer not imagining that the magazine’s decease was to take place the following month.

Of the ten poems that follow two are by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and will be duly considered hereafter: one of them being the exquisite *Sea Limits*, here called *From the Cliffs: Noon*, and the other an unpublished set of verses entitled *The Carillon*, a verse in which has already been referred to in the first chapter. *Emblems* will be familiar to readers of Thomas Woolner, and is succeeded by a characteristic sonnet, *Early Aspirations*, by William Bell Scott. William Rossetti contributed a second set of *Fancies at Leisure*, this time five in number, named respectively—*In Spring, In Summer, The Breadth of Noon, Sea-Freshness*, and *The Fire Smouldering*, the latter three of which are sonnets. The tenth poem, being the first of the papers of “The MS. Society,” is one of the only two humorous productions appearing in *The Germ*; it was by one of the Tupperes, the three papers having been written by J. L. and G. F. Tupper. It purports to be an incident in the Siege of Troy, seen from a modern observatory, and begins—

“Sixteen specials in Priam’s Keep  
Sat down to their mahogany:”

The two remaining papers in prose are called *Swift's Dunces* and *Mental Scales*, and are followed by William Rossetti's review of Cayley's romance in verse, *Sir Reginald Mohun*. The young critic charitably looks forward to a second canto with confidence in Mr. Cayley's gifts,—a confidence, I should think, unshared by any of the readers of *Sir Reginald Mohun*.

In May the last number of *The Germ*, alias *Art and Poetry*, appeared, with a very poor and mannered etching by W. H. Deverell, with illustrative verses by J. L. Tupper, called *Viola and Olivia*. But the first paper is one of special interest, being the only record left to the public of one, highly gifted, who died before the promise of his youth had matured—a young painter named John Orchard, frail and almost infirm from his childhood. This bodily frailty militated against a successful prosecution of his art, and the little he ever did publicly exhibit met with no encouragement; so, "feeling the vehicle of expression," in the editor's words, to be "more within his grasp than was the physical and toilsome embodiment of art," he purported a series of dialogues on art, wherein to work out his artistic convictions. The *Dialogue*, that occupies about twenty pages of *The Germ*, remains, unfortunately, only a fragment, for a week after it had been forwarded for publication its author was dead.

As to the popularity, and hence the utility, of the *Dialogue* as a form of instructive literature there may be considerable variance of opinion, but there can be no doubt that from an *author's* point of view it possesses great advantages. It admits of a bringing

together many side-lights upon one truth, within limited compass, such as would be impracticable in any essay or philosophic or literary discourse where art was not sacrificed to condensation; and has, if used by a master of the style, what may be called a dramatic *aura* that at once peculiarly affects the reader. Where direct instruction, based upon experience and fact, is intended, then the form is out of place; but where discussion from more points of view than one upon a debatable subject is desirable, then the dialogue form, if well managed, can be very effective. It will only be necessary to recall the name of one of the greatest of our English prose writers, Walter Savage Landor, to realise this.

In this *Dialogue on Art* by Mr. Orchard there are four speakers,—Kalon (in whose house the debate is carried on), Sophon, Kosmon, and Christian. In the personage of the last-named the author puts forward his own position, and, as might have been expected from the name, advocates the union of art and religion, or rather advocates their being already one, all high art being spiritual and therefore religious. Kalon may be said to represent the purely artistic position, while, as will be readily inferred from their names—Sophon and Kosmon regard the philosophic and scientific aspects of art respectively. Kalon is the Walt Whitman of the *Dialogue*, Christian the Longfellow: the one, luxuriating in and gladly cognisant of all the multiplicity of life, worships *Nature*; the other, not scorning indeed the human, yet ever looking to the superhuman, would restrain every impulse to one direction, the glorification of the beautiful, meaning thereby his own conception of the beautiful. Christian

takes up the nobler attitude throughout, but in real life he would probably have been more narrow—such a union of spirituality and intense religious fervour with due recognition of the beauty of things material and the claims of life as life, and nature as nature, being exceedingly rare. An extract of some length will show the attitude of Christian more clearly, both its highness and its self-sophistication; and the best I can select is one on the much-debated question of nudity in art, a question ever being discussed, and last summer waged often for and against in reference to Sir Frederick Leighton's beautiful and nobly conceived *Phryne at Eleusis*.

Kalon, having argued that if Christian's ideas were strictly carried out there would be little left for the artist to do, asks the latter if he, Kalon, were not right in understanding him to object to the use of any passion, whether heroic, patriotic, or loving, that was not rigidly virtuous:—

“*Christian*. I do. Without he has a didactic aim; like as Hogarth had. A picture, poem, or statue, unless it speaks some purpose, is mere paint, paper, or stone. A work of art must have a purpose, or it is not a work of *fine* art: thus, then, if it be a work of fine art, it has a purpose; and having purpose, it has either a good or an evil one: there is no alternative.

“*Sophon*. Suffer me to extend the just conclusions of Christian. Art—true art—fine art—cannot be either coarse or low. Innocent-like, no taint will cling to it, and a smock frock is as pure as “virginal-chaste robes.” And—sensualism, indecency, and brutality, excepted—sin is not sin, if not in the act; and, in satire, with the same exceptions, even sin in the act is tolerated when used to point forcibly a moral crime, or to warn society of a crying shame which it can remedy.

“*Kalon*. But my dear *Sophon*, and you, *Christian*,—you do

not condemn the oak because of its apples ; and, like them, the sin in the poem, picture, or statue, may be a wormy accretion grafted from without. The spectator often makes sin where the artist intended none. For instance, in the nude,—where perhaps, the poet, painter, or sculptor, imagines he has embodied only the purest and chastest ideas and forms, the sensualist sees—what he wills to see ; and, serpent-like, previous to devouring his prey, he covers it with his saliva.

“*Christian.* The Circean poison, whether drunk from the clearest crystal or the coarsest clay, alike intoxicates and makes beasts of men. Be assured that every nude figure or nudity introduced into a poem, picture, or piece of sculpture, merely on physical grounds, and only for effect, is vicious. And, where it is boldly introduced and forms the central idea, it ought never to have a sense of its condition : it is not nudity that is sinful, but the figure’s knowledge of its nudity (too surely communicated by it to the spectator), that makes it so. Eve and Adam before their fall were not more utterly shameless than the artist ought to make his inventions. The Turk believes that, at the judgment-day, every artist will be compelled to furnish, from his own soul, soul for every one of his own creations. This thought is a noble one, and should thoroughly awake poet, painter, and sculptor, to the awful responsibilities they labour under. With regard to the sensualist,—who is omnivorous, and, swine-like, assimilates indifferently pure and impure, degrading everything he hears and sees,—little can be said beyond this, that for him, if the artist be without sin, he is not answerable. But in this responsibility he has two rigid yet just judges, God and himself ;—let him answer there before that tribunal. God will acquit or condemn him only as he can acquit or condemn himself.

“*Kalon.* But, under any circumstances, beautiful nude flesh beautifully painted must kindle sensuality ; and, described as beautifully in poetry, it will do the like, almost, if not quite, as readily. Sculpture is the only form of art in which it can be used thoroughly pure, chaste, unsullied, and unsullying. I feel, Christian, that you mean this. And see what you do ! What a vast domain of art you set a Solomon’s seal upon ! how numberless are the poems, pictures, and statues—the most beautiful productions of their authors—you put in limbo ! To me, I confess, it appears the very top of prudery to condemn

these lovely creations, merely because they quicken some men's pulses.

"*Kosmon*. And to me, it appears hypercriticism to object to pictures, poems, and statues, calling them not works of art—or fine art—because they have no higher purpose than eye or ear-delight. If this law be held to be good, very few pictures called of the English school—of the English school, did I say?—very few pictures at all, of any school, are safe from condemnation: almost all the Dutch must suffer judgment, and a very large proportion of modern sculpture, poetry, and music, will not pass. Even *Christobel* and the *Eve of St. Agnes* could not stand the ordeal.

"*Christian*. Oh Kalon, you hardly need an answer! What! Shall the artist spend weeks and months, nay, sometimes years, in thought and study, contriving and perfecting some beautiful invention,—in order only that men's pulses may be quickened? What!—can he, Jesuit-like, dwell in the house of soul, only to discover where to sap her foundations?—Satan-like, does he turn his angel of light into a fiend of darkness, and use his God-delegated might against its giver, making Astartes and Molochs to draw other thousands of innocent lives into the embraces of sin? And as for you, Kosmon, I regard purpose as I regard soul; one is not more the light of the thought than the other is the light of the body; and both, soul and purpose, are necessary for a complete intellect; and intellect of the intellectual—of which the fine arts are the capital members—is not more to be expected than demanded. I believe that most of the pictures you mean are mere natural history paintings from the animal side of man. The Dutchman may, certainly, go Letheward; but for their colour, and subtleties of execution, they would not be tolerated by any man of taste."

The succeeding poem is also by Mr. Orchard, but shows no distinct poetic faculty. *Modern Giants* is a short paper by Frederick Stephens under the pseudonym of "Laura Savage." *To the Castle Ramparts* is a poem of over a hundred lines of blank verse, by William Rossetti, exhibiting the same love and intimate knowledge of certain aspects of nature characterising his

foregoing work in verse. This number also contains the *Pax Vobis* (afterwards reprinted as *World's Worth* in the reissue of 1881), and six sonnets by Gabriel—the latter being respectively *A Virgin and Child*, by *Hans Memmling*; *A Marriage of St. Katherine*, by the same; *A Dance of Nymphs*, by *Mantegna*; *A Venetian Pastoral*, by *Giorgione*; *Angelica rescued from the Sea Monster*, by *Ingres*; and a second sonnet on the same. The latter four only were afterwards printed, and will be referred to farther on in Chapter VII. Between the *Pax Vobis* and the six sonnets are a *Modern Idyl*, by W. H. Deverell, and a sonnet, *Jesus Wept*, by the Editor; and succeeding the latter are the fourth and fifth papers of the MS. Society, by J. L. Tupper—the first, *Smoke*, being clever and amusing.

*The Germ* comes to an end with two contributions by its editor, the first a review of Browning's *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*, and the second the fine sonnet *The Evil under the Sun*. When it is remembered that the date of this review was a time when Browning's writings were *caviare* to the general public, and that most of the criticism he had received had been either antagonistic or unsympathetic, the notice in *The Germ* becomes still worthier of remembrance. Mr. Browning here found a warm advocate, an advocate who judged his poems not by any fixed standard but the standard of *poetry*; an advocate who would not say a poet like Mr. Browning was a poet because he acknowledged the individual principles of this, that, or of all the great poets, but simply because he was Mr. Browning and spoke fitly in accordance with his time and circumstance. Because Pope wrote in heroic couplets or Milton in blank verse of a peculiarly sonorous kind, it



is no reason why Browning should do so also if otherwise impelled. Each poet must find his own form, and then it will be seen that the form and the subject are so interdependent that they must be considered in union and not separately. The way to judge a picture or poem, argues Mr. Rossetti, is not to say "this picture or this poem is not as I should have conceived and executed," but "what is the author's intention, and has that intention, whatever be its limits, resulted in successful achievement?" This method of criticism was not prevalent about 1850, and the hearts of painters and poets must have warmed towards the publicly unknown scribe in the unknown periodical.

The sonnet that concludes *The Germ* was written about eight months before its appearance in the magazine, namely, about October in 1849. It is the strongest and most individual poetic utterance of Mr. William Rossetti as yet referred to, having the simplicity and intense earnestness of another noble sonnet of the same order, *The Massacre in Piedmont*, of Milton. It has since been reprinted in Mr. T. Hall Caine's admirable selection of English sonnets by both contemporary and past writers entitled *Sonnets of Three Centuries*, appearing there under the improved title, *Democracy Downtrodden*, but with no alteration save the substitution of "here and there" instead of "one or two" in the second line of the sestet.

Altogether, a remarkable little volume; interesting because of the contributors who have since made their mark in the world, and interesting because of great part of the contents in themselves; remarkable because

of its being the official organ of the Preraphaelite or  
Protesting sect; and again remarkable because of the  
ability and promise frequently shown by writers still  
in their teens.

NOTE.—*Those who would wish to trace further the youthful writings  
of some of our best-known poets and painters will find much to repay  
them in the "Oxford and Cambridge Magazine" for 1856, the practical  
outcome of "The Germ."*

## CHAPTER III.

### ROSSETTI THE ARTIST—BOOK ILLUSTRATIONS— DESIGNS—PAINTINGS.

IN the preceding chapter I spoke of the constant union of poetic emotion with the artistic idea in everything that came from the pencil or the brush of Dante Rossetti; and it is this union that raises the work of the great artist in question so much above the level of English art in general. It may or may not be true, as M. Henri Delaborde says in his essay *Les Preraphaélites*, that an inability to understand the *chef-d'œuvres* of the Italian school is a vice of the national temperament of the English; for mere traditional, what may be called *Tourist* admiration is no criterion of the impression high art makes upon our countrymen at large; but it is undoubtedly the case that poetic art, until very recently at any rate, has never obtained more than a grudging public recognition in England: Landscape art, poetically, that is ideally, treated, has achieved a decided eminence indeed, but even there the bugbear of "Fancifulness," "Unreality," haunts the average spectator. The æsthetic movement in England, so much parodied and ridiculed, has been no mere vagary of fashion, but the stirring of a really awakening love of art in the upper or cultivated classes, and the artistic spirit may at last

be said to have come down upon a section of our countrymen. Once the seed has been well sown it is sure in due time to fructify, and the direct and indirect instruction and exemplification now given so widely to both art-student and the ever-widening art-public must soon or late result in a widespread appreciation of the beautiful in art in its universal sense, and in an intolerance of the prosaical surroundings so general both in private dwellings and public buildings that go so far to make average middle-class life barren in what is fair or seemly to the eye.

Certainly one of the strongest influences immediately originating this æsthetic movement was the genius of Rossetti, an influence, as it was, exercised in two arts. Interwoven as were the Romantic Revival and the Æsthetic Movement, it could hardly have been otherwise but that the young painter-poet should be strongly attracted to that Arthurian epoch, the legendary glamour of which has since made itself so widely felt in the Arthurian idyls of the laureate. Not only were several of his early designs drawn from this source but also in Oxford an important achievement was wrought which had an influence, however apparently extremely limited, which to this day makes itself felt both in our art and literature. Referring to this, Mr. Ruskin speaks in his lecture on *The Relation of Art to Religion*, delivered in Oxford, of our indebtedness to Rossetti as the painter to whose genius we owe the revival of interest in the cycle of early English legend.

To be a poetic painter was the ideal of Rossetti in art, an ideal he has certainly attained; and this, which was undoubtedly his chief charm, was perhaps also the

cause of his chief shortcoming, a frequent deficiency in form. Great colourists are seldom strict formalists, and that Rossetti at his best is one of the greatest colourists not only of our own but of any time will not now be generally denied. Colour-sentiment and poetic emotion seem to be kin, for they generally are found united; and though there are periods in his life-work when Rossetti's colour-sentiment predominated, the poetic emotion was in the main the spirit of his achievements. It is generally taught, and possibly wisely, in the development of ordinary talent, to first attain a mastery over form, then strive to achieve a corresponding result with colour, and finally think of your poetic subjective *motif* or objective subject; but Rossetti seems to have reversed this method, and thought first of his poetic *motif*, secondly of its representation through his marvellous powers of colour, and lastly of form, to which a stricter attention would doubtless have rendered his art really consummate. It has been urged against him that he lacks "flesh and blood," dealing only with dreams and abstractions. The painter of *Found* showed that he could paint modern life in a thoroughly "flesh and blood" manner; but the tendency of his genius was towards transcendental renderings of ideas, facts, or personalities: as a poetic painter, then, he should be judged, and not as a Hogarth or a Frith. Again, it has been said that "his method is undeniably mannered," but it must be remembered that mannerism is almost inseparable from the working out of a consistent high ideal; while as to the objection of his subjects and their treatment being foreign to common sympathies, this is in great part because

the spiritual is ever foreign to the material, the *un-*common to the common.

Although Rossetti made his mark in book-illustrating, his work in this way was very limited, so that it will not matter much if I refer to these few wood engravings out of their chronological order before considering further his position as an artist, and his work in crayon, water-colour, and oil.

These illustrative designs are ten in all : one published in W. Allingham's *Day and Night Songs*, in 1855 ; five published in 1857 in the illustrated poems of Tennyson brought out by Moxon ; two in 1862 in *The Goblin Market : and Other Poems*, by Christina Rossetti ; and two in 1866 in *The Prince's Progress : and Other Poems*, by the same author. The latter four, as being the most widely known, I will refer to first.

The quaint design, *Buy from us with a golden curl*, that preceded the title-page of *Goblin Market*, now also forms the frontispiece to the collective edition of Miss Rossetti's poems, and is therefore well known throughout Britain and America, the authoress having no more ardent admirers than her large public in the States. The line which is its *motif* is of course from the leading poem. In the background Lizzie is seen hurrying up the sloping bank from the haunted glen, while around Laura, sitting amongst the flags and rushes, are the cat-faced, rat-faced, owl-faced, wombat-faced, parrot-faced goblin men, with their melons and grapes on golden platters, and split over-ripe pomegranates in silver bowls, and luscious pears and pineapples in baskets. Ratface is beckoning to the retreating Lizzie, but the others are intent on poor

Laura, clipping off a lock of golden hair at the cunning persuasion of Catface. It will be observed that there is no consistency between the Lizzie of this and of the succeeding design; in the first, she being a regular country-girl frightened at the goblin rout, and in the second a stately Rossettian lady, if the word "stately" be not inapplicable to one asleep in bed.

The second illustration, called "Golden head by golden head," represents the two sisters asleep in their curtained bed and in each other's arms, "like two pigeons in one nest—folded in each other's wings." In a globe in the corner of the design are visioned the moon and stars, out of all proportion, shining above the goblin-men dancing down the slopes of the glen; an artifice meant to represent the dream that haunts Laura's sleep as she lies clasped in the protecting arms of her sister. Despite some technical inconsistencies the design is very charming, and must have delighted many a reader of the simple yet fascinating poem that made its author so well known.

The first illustration to *The Prince's Progress* has below it the line therefrom, "The long hours go and come and go," expressive of the weariness of her who waits like the Mariana of Tennyson's ballads for one who, tarrying, never comes. Spell-bound, the waiting bride to be sits in her room, watching with yearning eyes across the quaintly-ordered garden with the tiny fountain splashing through the summer-heat, unknowing that then the Prince is dallying underneath a shady apple-tree far thence with a cream-white maiden, who twines her hair in braids like serpent coils around him and holds him there for a day and

a night. The attitude is finely rendered and the engraving altogether finely illustrative of the lines in the poem chosen. That succeeding, which is the only one of the four which is full-page, illustrates the occasion when the tardy Prince has at length arrived at his destination, only to find his promised bride just dead. In a high quaint carven bed she lies at rest at last, veiled in white, with hands crossed above her bosom, and her crown on a pillow behind the weary head. Above it a row of lamps are burning, and in front of it her young handmaidens are singing her death-song. At the doorway the Prince stands, with bent head and hand-covered face—stunned with the shock, and full of grief and remorse; and with him with a cruel dignity expostulates the bride's mother or nurse, with her hands against his breast, as though repelling him from the sacred precincts hallowed by death where he had no right now to enter. "You should have wept her yesterday" are the words she is saying—now it is too late; the white sleep-poppies are now the fitting flowers and no longer the red roses he brings with him, and which have fallen at his feet. This is a very fine design in drawing, condensation of material, and in general effect, though the engraving is not up to the mark throughout.

These four designs differ materially from those in the quarto Tennyson—differ in the important matter of interpretation. They are really illustrations, that is, they are based upon certain lines in the *Goblin Market* or *The Prince's Progress*, and adhere strictly to those lines or relative descriptions elsewhere in the poems, and are thus simply pictorial representations of the text. But the Tennyson designs, though of an



earlier date, can hardly be called such, being more justly definable as original creations; for, though illustrative of the *spirit* of the poems they accompany, they more or less but slightly adhere to their separate subject lines or verses. The four that were published with his sister's volumes showed Rossetti to be an apt illustrator, but those of 1857 show him to be primarily a creative artist—a line, a name, like St. Cecily, being sufficient to germinate the idea that produced illustrations not literal but spiritual. Herein these Tennyson designs are the more characteristic of him, for his intense individuality and vivid imagination at once cast their own glow over whatever of another appealed strongly to him, so that both in translating a canzone from the old Italian and illustrating a poem of Tennyson he renders in general the spirit more literally than even the external form. Such an engraving as the one coming first in the *Palace of Art* has really but little to do with the poem, and is hence inefficient as an actual illustration, however noteworthy as an original design. No doubt in the main such a method of translation or illustration is the best, except for technical purposes; for it is more important to be impressed by the *spirit* of a poem than by exactitude of pictorial delineation or insistence in the translation on the literal wording and form of the original—as in the instance of Mr. Fitzgerald's famous rendering of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, where the beautiful and powerful work of the Persian poet is brought home to us more truly as well as effectively than exact literalness could possibly have done. But work of this kind must be the work of genius, otherwise the literal version is almost necessarily preferable—for none but

genius can adequately represent genius in individualising renderings.

Of the five engravings on wood after designs by Rossetti which illustrate poems in the fine illustrated quarto edition of Tennyson's select work, brought out, as I have already mentioned, in 1857, the first is one founded on the last two verses of *The Lady of Shalott*. In the immediate foreground is the boat bearing its dead burthen, over whose head an arched covering supports burning candles, how there and how litten known only to the designer; and, being moored to the oaken stairway of the palace in Camelot, the light of the torch held by some servitor gleams on the pale silent face of her who lies so still and quiet, as well as on the face of Lancelot as he stoops above her, musing on her possible story. Beyond are swans on the river, startled by the sudden commotion, and, farther off, hurrying figures attracted from revelry or service by the strange spectacle. The most satisfactory drawing in this design is that of Lancelot, whose figure is finely fore-shortened as he bends from the stairway over the barge; while the half-jesting half-real curiosity of the courtier behind him is well rendered. The succeeding illustration is to the ballad *Mariana in the South*, its *motif* being the third verse. Mariana has cast herself down before a crucifix, and is kissing the feet of the body of Christ, "with melancholy eyes divine, The home of woe without a tear." In her hands she holds old letters written to her by the lover who never comes, and others have fallen from their fastenings below her knees and over the couch on which she rests: and behind her is a mirror in antique wooden frame which reflects "the clear per-

fection of her face." The execution of this design is good, and the interpretation sympathetic; and where the latter differs from literalness it is generally to artistically improve, as in the substitution of a crucifix, whose feet Mariana embraces in mingled adoration and supplication, for the image of "Our Lady" mentioned in the third verse.

Quite different from the simplicity of *Mariana* is the first design for *The Palace of Art*, already referred to. I have read or heard it explained that the two figures represent the soul and the body, the former still in a trance, but being kissed into the music of life by the desire of the latter. The illustration, however, is in reality mainly based upon the following verse:—

"Or in a clear-walled city on the sea,  
Near gilded organ-pipes, her hair  
Wound with white roses, slept St. Cecily;  
An angel look'd at her."

The design is a marvellously intricate one, and in the extreme so-called Preraphaelite manner. The gilded organ-pipes are in centre of the foreground and seem to be raised above a dungeon, the inner darkness and outer bars of which just appear; in the left corner an armed soldier is eating an apple, and in the right a dove is winging its flight apparently from the dungeon, symbolising probably a life that has escaped at last the control of any earthly guard. At the organ kneels St. Cecily, with nerveless hands laid on the notes, and head and body inclined backward in the embrace of the very dishevelled and mortal-like angel. Behind the organ is a dial, and, beyond, the walls of a great city mounted with cannon; beyond again, the

quiet sea thronged with ships from strange waters. Below, in the centre of the design, is a deep court, with a tree very much out of perspective, and a man at a draw-well. This, as will be apprehended from the foregoing description, is really an illustration *for* the poem, not *of* any verse therein; but if it is not an interpretation it is a creation, and therefore interesting in its very disassociation from the work of the poet.

Regarding this design, Mr. Ruskin's words may be remembered in the appendix to his *Elements of Drawing* where, after referring to the cutting on the wood being bad, especially in rendering the expression of the faces, he adds, "This is especially the case in the *St. Cecily*, Rossetti's first illustration to the *Palace of Art* which would have been the best in the book had it been well engraved. The whole work should be taken up again, and done by line-engraving, perfectly; and wholly from Preraphaelite designs, with which no other modern work can bear the least comparison" Relative to the last clause, there is a true and somewhat similar remark in M. Prosper Mérimée's Essay in *Les Beaux Arts en Angleterre*.

The companion illustration is much simpler both in conception and execution. It represents "mythic Uther's deeply wounded son" lying dozing in Avalon, with round him ten weeping and watching queens; while the strange barque that brought him there is moored beyond the rocky shore, and what looks like a small chapel stands on the farther desolate coast. It is not the Avalon of legend, but the Avalon of the artist, sad with the gloom of a strange land and a strange doom. One of the queens is recognisable as having been modelled on the artist's sister, Christina.

The last of the designs for this volume, and the most beautiful, is that illustrative of the third stanza of *Sir Galahad*. The "Maiden-knight" has reached some lonely sanctuary, having heard afar off in the wood a noise as of chanted hymns; before the altar in the sacred shrine, where he has arrived seeing neither worshipper nor habitant, the tapers burn, and in their light the silver sacramental vessels gleam; while, standing on rough wooden stairs, he bows before it, stooping to make the sign of the cross on his face with the holy water in a vessel suspended on a beam. In front, between and above him and the altar, a slanted bell is giving forth its solemn clang, tolled by (to him) unseen nuns, singing at intervals strange chants. Beyond in the forest darkness his horse, clad with white banner with a red cross, and impatiently pawing the ground, awaits him. This design is simple and impressive to a high degree, and poet and artist seem mutual interpreters.

The illustration to Mr. Allingham's book is for some lines in the poem called *The Maids of Elfen-Merc*; the subject being the appearance of the three maids to the dreamy boy, who pines away, and ultimately dies. This design has been so spoilt in the cutting, it is difficult to decide what rank it should take. Regarding this design, the following words, known to have been written by Mr. Burne Jones as long ago as 1856 in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, will be of interest to many possessing, or acquainted with, the *Day and Night Songs* (2d series):—

"There is one more I cannot help noticing for its marvellous beauty, a drawing of higher finish and pretension than the last, from the pencil of Rossetti, in

Allingham's *Day and Night Songs*, just published. It is, I think, the most beautiful drawing for an illustration I have ever seen ; the weird faces of the maids of Elfen-Mere, the musical, timid movement of their arms together as they sing, the face of the man, above all, are such as only a great artist could conceive."

Compared with the innumerable book-illustrations of his quondam coadjutor, Mr. Millais, Rossetti has done but little in this important if till lately and even yet much neglected and abused branch of art ; yet of such quality is this scanty production that if nothing else were to be preserved of the great painter who has so lately gone from our midst, it is certain that the record of his worth would not find contradiction in these designs, showing as they do the original creative power of a true artist. Probably one reason of this paucity in illustrative design might be found in the incessantly active imagination of Rossetti, an imagination especially individual and peculiar, rendering him averse to expend labour in interpretation of another's thoughts when so plentiful were his own conceptions. Indeed this very fertility of conception militated against many achievements on a large scale, for the temptation to embody a new idea before the last had reached from the sketch state to the oil painting was often too great to be resisted ; hence, in viewing the sum total of this painter's works, we find the germs of important pictures in pen and ink, chalk, and water-colour drawings never utilised.<sup>1</sup> The creative faculty

<sup>1</sup> Another, and a very potent reason, for this, is the fact that his small purchasing public were in general desirous of replicas of his famous single figure studies, or similar pictures, so that he had not the requisite encouragement to carry out *all* his noble designs. Indeed, some of his letters trying to induce intending purchasers to take his fine subjects instead of single figures are most pathetic.

when allied with slow executive power, as was the case with Rossetti, naturally predisposes a painter against the labour entailed in high finish on a large scale, and to a preference for the more rapid mediums of pencil, chalk, and water-colour: hence some of the most important and striking creations of this artist have never reached beyond the limits of small water-colours or drawings, as, for instance, the powerful *Death of Lady Macbeth*, and the strange *How They Met Themselves*. Such designs were always, or generally, meant for future enlargement; but only comparatively now and again did this occur, for new ideas were ever pleading for expression. An intense fervour characterises Rossetti's work from the earliest days of crude execution and forced colour to his last great painting, the impressive *Salutation of Beatrice*; and the same words might be spoken of this characteristic as Ruskin used in speaking of Pre-Raphaelite work in general: "None but the ignorant could be unconscious of its truth, and none but the insincere regardless of it."<sup>1</sup>

In a recently-published essay on Rossetti as an artist, the author writes thus: "But there is another barrier besides mysticism between this artist and the public. His ultimate sum-total of female or, indeed, of male beauty is not, from a public standpoint, very sympathetic." Yet it is in his female facial beauty that Rossetti has surpassed all living painters. It is surely admissible to say that he has given an individual spiritual significance to the female face such as art has not yet recorded, invested it with a charm of spiritual beauty wholly original. The type may or

<sup>1</sup> *Lectures on Painting and Architecture*. Edinburgh, 1853. Addenda to Fourth Lecture.

may not be of the highest, may or may not appeal to many, but it is undoubtedly a type such as we look in vain for elsewhere in antecedent and, indeed, in contemporary art; and there are occasions when the intensity of its inner significance is so strong as to constrain the beholder to the strange spiritual personality represented, *alone*, leaving him altogether oblivious to the details of the rendering. Take such instances as *Proserpina*, or *Pandora*, or *Beata Beatrix*, or *La Pia*, or *Mnemosyne*, or *Sybilla Palmifera*, and it will be impossible not to recognise that a new spiritual type of the female face has been given to the art of the world by Dante Rossetti. Personally, *Mnemosyne* has for me a special fascination: the eyes of this lovely portraiture of idealised memory are as "sweet and subtle" as those of De Quincey's *Mater Lachrymarum*, "filled with perished dreams," like those of his *Mater Suspiriorum*. Again, what wonderful expression has the face of Beatrice in *Beata Beatrix*, despite the closed eyelids and the passive trance condition; indeed, what has been said by one of the most masterly and cultivated art-writers of our time, Mr. Walter Pater, of Michelangelo, may in the last phrase be said of Dante Rossetti: "No one ever expressed more truly than Michelangelo the notion of inspired sleep, of faces charged with dreams."<sup>1</sup> As to the essayist's further remarks with reference to Rossetti's subjects, and their treatment being foreign to common sympathies, it is simply, as regards his art-work, the question of the old divergence between

<sup>1</sup> *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*. By Walter Pater, Fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford. Macmillan and Co. One of those books which no lover as well as student of high art can afford to be without, full as it is of the higher criticism and the most sympathetically interpretive spirit.



idealists and non-idealists ; but with reference to his poetry, surely the writer has forgotten such poems as *The King's Tragedy*, *The White Ship*, etc., ballads such as cannot help appealing to common sympathies, alive as these, moreover, ever are to the "ballad" as a literary record or vehicle of emotion.

I must also take exception to the same writer's remarks as to Rossetti's nature painting and to his use of symbolism. As to the first, he writes : "A flower (or rather the phantom of a flower, for even this bit of nature with Rossetti is dreamy) is sometimes introduced on his canvas or even on the frame of his picture. To the initiated this flower speaks parables ; to the ignorant (the many) it is an obtrusive enigma," etc. This is quite an unfounded statement, and, to take only a few instances, what of such a flower as the lily in the *Annunciation*, or of the fig-leaves in *La Donna della Finestra*, or of the sycamore boughs in the *Day-Dream*, or the convolvulus tendrils in *La Ghirlandata*, or the apple-blossoms in *Fiammetta*, or the vine-leaves clustering around La Pia, as she sits in her fortress-prison in the Maremma ? I have watched the artist at work on the latter, and know with what care and enjoyment he painted those beautiful, lucent, *real* leaf-clusters. Again, in landscape, how beautiful is the twilit stream creeping along underneath shadowy boughs, in the predella of *The Blessèd Damsel*, and in the glimpses of green forest we get every now and again in the Arthurian and Dante drawings.<sup>1</sup>

With reference to the use of symbolism, Mr. Tire-

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most notable instance of Rossetti's painting of landscape is the beautiful little picture called *Water Willow*, belonging to Mr. W. A. Turner.

buck (the writer in question) says that while such has the aspect of learning, it also hints at least a want of expressional power; that Rossetti's symbols are really made to express what the character in his picture, by its simple existence, ought to express; that by giving Love or Death or Memory a separate expression in a plant, flower, or a bird, he converts the character (the very core of his subject) into a superior lay figure elaborately labelled with its attributes; and adds, that if the character representing an emotion does not tell that emotion without the aid of a symbol, which really becomes a pictorial ticket, has not the artist failed in the higher eloquence of art?

But what is there to prevent "the higher eloquence of art" finding expression in symbolism, if through symbolism the mind of the spectator is more rapidly affected? How could an artist better express, say, the personality of a "Persephone," than by placing in her hand the significant pomegranate? In a sense this might be what Mr. Tirebuck calls pictorial-ticketism, but none the less is it true artistic symbolism. And would the putting of this pomegranate in the painting, in preference to leaving Persephone in her simple womanhood, or walking in a meadow of which no feature was so distinctive as to impress the onlooker as Sicilian, show a want of expressional power? Why should time be wasted in speculating as to the *motif* of a picture if some easily recognisable symbol would at once suggest the subject—or is the latter not a pleasanter method of discovery than having to look doubtfully to the explanation of a printed catalogue? Nor can even a dual or repeated symbolism be out of place if at once unobtrusive and relative. Thus there is additional sig-

nificance in the portraiture of Love in *Dante's Dream* as a youth clothed in a soft, flame-coloured garment, and in the placing a scallop-shell clasp on his shoulder, taking away the impression of individualism given by an actual figure, and symbolising the Emotion, the Love, that, visiting every land and every household, like the scallop-wearing pilgrim of old wanders ever over the earth.

The same writer I have been referring to repeats a mistake that is frequently indulged in, viz. the supposition that asceticism is a main feature of Rossetti's work. It is true there was a severity amounting to asceticism in some of the early religious works, but by no means universally, while of the greater number of his large paintings it would be difficult to select any with the shadows of the cloisters upon them; his facial type is not, as is ignorantly supposed by some, synonymous with the less material creations of Mr. Burne Jones, but highly sensuous though only rarely sensual. Any one knowing the *Venus Verticordia*, especially the original in chalk, or the *Lilith*, would hardly imply the asceticism of the cloisters to Rossetti's female portraitures.

There is a magnetic quality in his work which irresistibly attracts, a potent individualism that exercises a charm even over alien natures—and this not alone in his art but in his poetic work as well. What manifests itself so strongly in the outcome of his genius exhibits itself in a high degree in the personality of Rossetti himself; and it is almost certain that no man of his time has had such an influence over younger men of genius and talent in both arts as was exercised by him. To some it is given to move the masses; to

others it is given to move those who in turn attain the public appreciation; both are in the end equal, and a man should not be judged by the extent of his audience but by his work itself.

Some time ago in a critical notice of Rossetti I read that his ideal in art and literature was synonymous with the Greek, but work more opposite, whether for good or evil, to the Greek spirit can scarcely be imagined. It is true the beautiful was the ideal of the Greek artistic mind, and also that the beautiful was the aim of Rossetti in his dual vocation—but how different the conceptions of beauty! The former looked to light, clearness, form, in painting, sculpture, architecture; to intellectual conciseness and definiteness in poetry; the latter looked mainly to diffused colour, gradated to almost indefinite shades in his art, finding the harmonies thereof more akin than severity of outline and clearness of form,<sup>1</sup> while in his poetry the Gothic love of the supernatural, the Gothic delight in sensuous images, the Gothic instinct of indefiniteness and elaboration carried to an extreme, prevailed. Not only were his modes of expression more allied to the Gothic than the Greek, and naturally his art-aspirations, but also his appreciations; he would take more pleasure in a design by David Scott or William Blake, or an etching by Méryon, than in the more strictly artistic drawing of some revered classicist, more enjoyment in the weird or dramatic Scottish ballad than in Pindaric or Horatian ode; and he would certainly rather have had Shakespeare than Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides put together.

<sup>1</sup> This statement is of course inapplicable to such work as *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, and the *Ecce Ancilla Domini*.

Colour and imaginative *motif*, these he always instinctively apprehended in precedence of pure intellect and perfect clarity of outline.<sup>1</sup> I remember well the interest and pleasure he took in the mystical and sonorous utterances of Jacob Boëhme with their strange accompanying illustrations by Law, to which I introduced him; and certainly nothing could well be more alien to the "Greek" than the old German's half-inspired half-mad dissertations, and the vaguely symbolical designs of his English translator and commentator.

Certainly in the very front rank of colourists it would be difficult to name any one who equalled, certainly none who surpassed, Rossetti in his wonderful management of blues and greens. These colours, with innumerable shades and gradations, he constantly used, the blue predominating; and in many instances they form the staple of a picture which yet does not challenge attention by monotony of hue. A fine example of this can be seen in the picture entitled *Mary in the House of John*, an early work but full of the peculiar beauty of gradation so distinctive of the artist. As a piece of magnificent colouring, full of variations in the same hue, I remember nothing to equal the effect of *Mariana*, in the possession of Mr. William Graham.

Rossetti was one of the most consistent of artists, his ideals altering but slightly, and his execution being nothing more than an upward advance. He had but one aim in art—have something to say first, and then say it beautifully; an aim that is very simple in expression, but beyond nine out of every ten artists to accomplish. To none could his own words be more ap-

<sup>1</sup> The perfect drawing of his heads and hands may seem contradictory to this, but the statement is broadly-speaking true.

plicable than to himself, worshipper as he was at that shrine where "under the arch of life," guarded by "love and death, terror and mystery," beauty sits enthroned:—

"This is that Lady Beauty, in whose praise  
Thy voice and hand shake still, long known to thee  
By flying hair and fluttering hem,—the beat  
Following her daily of thy heart and feet,  
How passionately and irretrievably,  
In what fond flight, how many ways and days!"

Comparisons of one painter with another seldom really fit the case, and still less frequently is such likely when there is strong individualism to be taken into account; but it is probably, as a well-known art-critic has pointed out, approximately true to say that Rossetti is more akin to Tintoret than to any other of the great masters. He has all the glow and colour of the Venetians, and while he may fall short of the best of them in technical workmanship, he is certainly not surpassed in mastery of hues and choice of subjects. His earliest oil painting is strikingly unlike the Venetian school, and it was not until after he had painted *The Girlhood of the Virgin* that the significance of colour took hold on his imagination, while he also was fascinated by the executive charm of such artists as Hans Memmeling and Van Eyck; but in his middle period and later works the Venetian love of colour was a dominant influence.

It has frequently been asserted that nothing by Rossetti, except the small picture just mentioned and the *Dante's Dream* bought by the Liverpool Corporation, has ever been publicly exhibited, but as a matter of fact several more or less important water-colours, crayon drawings, and pictures, have been on view in

provincial academies and galleries, in so-called private galleries in London, in Christie's sale-rooms, and in one or two of the numerous Piccadilly and New Bond Street art galleries. Thus in 1850, in the exhibition held at the Portland Gallery, Regent Street, there were on view and sale the beautiful *Ecce Ancilla Domini* or *Annunciation*, and a water-colour drawing entitled *Giotto painting Dante's portrait*. In the Liverpool Academy of 1858 there were three water-colour drawings by him, entitled *A Christmas Carol*, *The Wedding of St. George*, and *Dante's Dream on the Day of the Death of Beatrice*; the last mentioned having been exhibited the preceding year in the "Pre-raphaelite" Exhibition at Russell Place, Fitzroy Square, where also was the companion piece *The Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice*, in addition to *Hesterna Rosa*, *Mary Magdalene*, and *The Blue Closet*, and possibly one or two minor drawings, meriting the mention in a contemporary notice of "the somewhat numerous contributions of Mr. Gabriele Rossetti" constituting the main interest of the exhibition. That this was by no means an unimportant exhibition will be recognised by those familiar with the drawings mentioned, as well as by those who recall the sentence concerning one of them, the *Mary Magdalene*, quoted from Ruskin in the last chapter. Again, there were exhibited in the Royal Scottish Academy in 1862 two important or interesting pictures, one called *Fair Rosamond*, and the other entitled *The Farmer's Daughter*, the latter being the study for what was ultimately to become known as *Found*; these, moreover, were sent for exhibition and sale by the artist himself. In 1877 the *Tibullus' return to Delia* was No.

424 in the Albert Gallery Exhibition in Edinburgh, having been lent for the purpose by its owner, Mr. J. M'Gavin of Glasgow; in 1877 or 1878 Mr. Graham of Skelmorlie lent his fine *Pandora* to the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts, where also, in 1879, there was the beautiful little water-colour called *Spring*, belonging to the late A. B. Stewart of Ascog. During the spring and summer of this year there was to be seen at the Fine Art Society's Galleries the characteristic and beautiful picture referred to as *Mary in the House of John*; and the lovely little oil called *Bocca Baciata*, as well as a drawing entitled *Lucrezia Borgia* (not the same design as that of 1851 belonging to Mr. G. P. Boyce), will be remembered by many at the Hogarth Club's (I think first) Exhibition.

Of course these remarks are only written to correct a frequent misstatement, for, as far as enabling the general public to become acquainted with his work, these few pictures at widely apart times and places mean practically next to nothing.<sup>1</sup> It was not a quarrel with academical authority, as has sometimes been stated, that led Rossetti to the decision of non-exhibition of his compositions, but his consciousness of the indifferent work that found such "acres of wall" ever ready, and his dislike to association of his work with such, knowing how his colours would suffer by sur-

<sup>1</sup> During last summer a loan exhibition of pictures was held at the Royal Manchester Institution, where were on view nine compositions by Rossetti; four water-colours, *Washing Hands* (Mr. Craven's), *Proserpina* (replica), *Lucrezia Borgia* (replica of Mr. Boyce's original), and *Hesperia Rosa* (replica in colour from the drawing of 1851); and five oil paintings, *Proserpina* (Mr. Turner's), *Two Mothers*, *Joli Cœur*, *A Vision of Fiammetta*, and the *Water Willow*. Certainly the most important public exhibition of Rossetti's work that has taken place previous to the winter of 1882.



rounding vulgarities. Moreover, at the early period of his career in question, such imaginative work as his met with little recognition but with much misunderstanding, so that it is not to be wondered at if he decided that his appreciators must come to him, and not he go to his appreciators; again, he was conscious of his defects in drawing, and knew that defects are much quicker spied out than abilities; and lastly, he recognised the distraction of exhibiting, and the danger of forced guidance by immature or false public taste. In course of time he could have relapsed from this decision without injury to his reputation or position, but the habit and determination of earlier years had become fixed, and to the last his aversion, at least in so far as taking action himself, remained.

Before going on to consider Rossetti's art-work, I must dwell for a moment on his use of his materials. Those who have seen his oil paintings will have recognised a depth, a glow, and a masterly strength thoroughly characteristic of the school, if any, to which he assimilates; his colours are never glaring, but are instinct with light, and in gradation are specially remarkable. His best water-colours have a depth akin to his works in oil, such a depth and fervour of hue as to frequently give the impression of being the more solid medium; their effects are more brilliant but not, except in the earlier compositions, less held in just reserve. It is in chalk that he is a specialist,—a seductive but seldom mastered medium: and the strength of colour and beauty of line he could create with his crayons is unsurpassed, and perhaps unequalled by any living artist. But though a specialist in chalk in the sense of having a special mastery over that form, it is of course in oil that he

is supreme, and in oil it was that he felt it only possible to develop his genius to its full extent. That he recognised this will be seen by the following letter, written by him to the *Athenæum*, with reference to a remark in a notice of some of his paintings:—

“ 16 CHEYNE WALK, CHELSEA,

“ Oct. 15, 1865.

“ I see that at the outset of your description of some of my recent pictures, it is said that I have, ‘of late,’ to some extent ‘resumed the practice of oil painting.’ Will you allow me to say that I never abandoned such a practice, or considered myself otherwise than as an oil painter, in which character only I first became known. Commissions for water-colour drawings have since induced me sometimes to adopt that material; but now, for a good many years past, all my chief works have been again in oil. As the proper understanding of this point is of great professional importance to me, will you oblige me by publishing this letter?—I am, etc.,

D. G. ROSSETTI.”

The earliest production by Dante Rossetti of which I can find record is the interesting portrait of his father made in 1847, Gabriele Rossetti the elder being at this time about sixty-four, and the weakness of sight that had long troubled him ‘having practically become blindness. This and a small but beautiful pencil head of himself (the artist), probably done about the same time or in the succeeding year, belong to his aunt, Miss Charlotte Polidori. There is also belonging to this period (1848) the pen-and-ink sketch of himself, already in the first chapter mentioned as being in the possession of Mr. W. B. Scott, which may be taken partly as self-caricature, partly *au sérieux*; for, according to the statement of the friend and fellow-student who originally possessed the sketch, the young artist really used to go about at that time in a somewhat antique long-tailed coat.

Fine, however, as is the painting of his father, a greater interest naturally attaches to Rossetti's frequently referred to *Girlhood of the Virgin*. Shortly after leaving the antique school in the Royal Academy, where, as has been already mentioned in the first chapter, he was but a very desultory student, he began this his first pictorial achievement in oil, being at this time (1848) settled in a studio at 7 Cleveland Street, Fitzroy Square. It was sent, not to the Portland Gallery as generally stated, but to its predecessor at Hyde Park Corner, managed by the "Association for Promoting the Free Exhibition of Modern Art," and in the exhibition there held in 1849 was exhibited as "No. 368, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, by G. D. Rossetti." It was priced at £80, and the address of the painter was given as "G. D. Rossetti, Charlotte St., Portland Place," which was his father's residence. In the catalogue was printed an illustrative sonnet, since reprinted amongst the *Sonnets for Pictures* in the *Poems*, which I will not give here, as it will be found mentioned with its many alterations in Chapter VII.; but I may quote the beautiful lines applied to Mary—

"Thus held she through her girlhood ; as it were  
An angel-watered lily, that near God  
Grows, and is quiet."

Any one ignorant of the young painter's personality and made cognisant of his fitful technical training would have had no hesitation in prophesying a disastrous failure; those who knew both the man and his habits expected certainly some effort full of emotion or thought, but probably somewhat crude in colour and surely deficient in drawing and harmony of arrangement: so

the result was correspondingly surprising and gratifying when the finished picture was ready for inspection. Artistically, it was full of promise despite somewhat crudely faint colour, and emotionally it was permeated with an earnestness and dignity that at once appealed to those open to such influences. It is the only one of his oil paintings signed, so far as I am aware, with the letters P.R.B. after his name, while, despite the specification in the catalogue, is painted in the left hand-corner "Dante Gabriele Rossetti," with the date 1849. Several times in later life he put the final "e" to his second name, but his usual pictorial signature was generally the well-known circular monogram, or else occasionally "Dante Rossetti."

To the right of the picture, seated at a kind of folding table, are the figures of St. Anna and the young Mary, the latter engaged in some scriptural embroidery.<sup>1</sup> The face of the Virgin is pale and ascetic, exactly such a Mary as Rénan imagines, full of dreams and visions; it is quite unlike the painter's best-known type, uniting as it does the simplicity of refined girlhood with the individuality of approaching womanhood. Above the long fair hair that sweeps over her shoulders and past her waist, almost touching a small harpsichord behind where she sits, is an oblong golden circlet, within which are the letters "S. Maria S. M.;" her dress is more beautiful in its soft gray colour than in its folds and gradations, having evidently been painted from a very thin and angular model, while her sleeves are of sage green as they are disclosed a little above the wrists, with a pink band along the hem of her gray robe. With her right hand

<sup>1</sup> Mary is an accurate portrait of Miss Christina Rossetti, and St. Anna of the artist's mother.

holding the needle poised above her embroidery, underneath which her left is suddenly arrested as it disentangles the threads, she looks earnestly before her as though seeing in vision the young angel represented in the picture as cherishing the Annunciation Lily; on her right sits Anna clothed with a dark myrtle-green mantle over a pale umber robe, and with a white band across her forehead underneath a brick-red head-covering falling in folds on either side her face, watching with clasped hands the work her daughter is engaged on—with also above her calm dignified face an oblong golden circlet containing the inscription “S. Anna.” In front of them are six large and heavily-bound volumes placed on the floor, one above the other, representing by the names visibly written on each the cardinal virtues, *Caritas*, *Fides*, *Spes*, *Prudentia*, *Temperantia*, and *Fortitudo*—their respective hues being golden-brown, blue, pale-green, gray, white, and light-brown; and above these is a simple but curiously-designed reddish pot, out of which grows to a considerable height a beautiful three-flowered lily, tended night and day by a quaint young angel whose only heavenly characteristics are the two rose-coloured wings folded half round him, reaching as they do from his head to narrow points at his feet. He has in his allotted watch an absorbed intent look that better than any artifice tells of his invisibility, altogether an angel-child of a severe ascetic godliness—differing wholly from the joyous and sportive children whom Correggio loved to introduce and so excelled in painting, differing yet quite as charming perhaps in his own way, in reality because of his thorough harmony with the whole composition. In the immediate foreground, in front of the

angel-guarded lily and the books of life and by the side of Mary and her mother, are some long bare slips of thorn, two of them almost spears, emblematical, of course, of the future passion. Beyond them a carved stone balcony runs across the picture, with hung over it the pale crimson coat of Joachim, and behind them a long curtain of olive-green is drawn two-thirds back upon a bar suspended crosswise, opening up the landscape beyond. Underneath the upper stone semicircle of the window is a trained vine laden with fruit, which Joachim with upstretched arms is tending and pruning; and specially remarkable is the drawing and painting of the vine-leaves, which are very beautiful—all the more noteworthy from the indifference to such workmanship exhibited by the great body of the artistic contemporaries of the painter's youth. Above Joachim is likewise the circlet with the inscription "S. Joachinus," and though his face is of a Scottish or American type it is in perfect conformity with those of Mary and Anna and with the spirit of the whole design; the vine he is tending is intended to represent the future Church, if such symbolism appeals to the spectator, if not he can look on it simply as the natural work of a Nazarene countryman. Between him and the balustrade narrow supporting stems, round which cling young ivy tendrils, form a cross—a design so exquisitely executed as in nowise to force its symbolical meaning upon an onlooker, and which, indeed, is hardly apparent till after the first glance has become interested study; and on a higher support broods a white dove, surrounded by a flat oval golden halo in the most quaintly Fra Angelesque manner, signifying the blessing and presence of the Holy Spirit. On the balus-

trade itself is an oil-lamp of antique pattern, and a narrow glass bottle filled with water, from which bends a rose, beautiful as, if not really, a Rose of Sharon ; and beyond is a landscape in the Italian Preraphaelite manner, wherein the quiescent lake of Galilee dreams against a sparsely tree-clad shore, with at the hither end tall poles with fisher nets hung up to dry, and on the left a rounded hill with a temple on its summit.

Altogether, a most fascinating and even beautiful composition, though wholly lacking the depth and glow of colour so characteristic of Rossetti's mature work, and such as once seen not likely to be soon forgotten ; made doubly remarkable by its being the conception and work of a youth still in his twenty-first year. The artist had it in his studio about 1875 or 1876 for re-inspection, and he had it then photographed ; but few impressions were taken, and fortunate may the few friends be considered to whom Rossetti gave such. In addition to the sonnet already referred to as appearing in the catalogue of the Portland Gallery Exhibition, there is painted on the frame on the base by its side the following sonnet, hitherto unprinted :—

“These are the symbols : on that cloth of red  
I' the centre is the Tripoint, perfect each  
Except the second of its points to teach  
That Christ is not yet born. The books whose head  
Is golden charity, as Paul hath said,  
Those virtues are wherein the soul is rich,  
Therefore on them the lily standeth which  
Is Innocence being interpreted :  
The seven-thorn'd briar and the palm seven-leaved  
Are her great sorrow and her great reward.  
Until the time be full the Holy One  
Abides without. She soon shall have achieved  
Her perfect purity :—yea, God the Lord  
Shall soon vouchsafe His Son to be her Son.”

This picture, which would now fetch such a considerable sum, was purchased at the catalogue price (£80) by the Marchioness of Bath, who subsequently gave it to its present owner, her daughter, now Lady Louisa Feilding. Amongst the very earliest water-colour drawings (if not, as I think likely, *the* earliest) by Rossetti is one belonging to Mr. William Bell Scott; a drawing that is specially interesting not only on this account, but also as being one of the only two pictorial records extant of the great charm the poetry of Robert Browning had for him in his youth. He painted at least two or three others from the same source of inspiration, but such were either mislaid and lost, or destroyed because of their manifold technical deficiencies, so that with one exception there now only remains the one specified with its subject lines—

“In this devil’s smithy

Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?”

the point chosen for illustration being that when the heroine of the poem gives up her pearls in payment to the alchemist for the poison. Rossetti’s second water-colour was a small upright female figure in red which he painted as a present to Mr. Ford Madox Brown.

No wonder that Mr. Ruskin was attracted to the work of the young artist who before manhood had really been entered upon produced two such compositions as *The Girlhood of the Virgin* and the *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, regarding the latter of which readers of the *Nineteenth Century* will remember some remarks in two papers that appeared in November and December 1878, entitled *The Three Colours of Pre-raphaelitism*. In the second of these papers he speaks of its mental power consisting in the discern-



ment of what was lovely in present nature, and, in pure moral emotion concerning it; and of its physical power, in an intense veracity of direct realisation to the eye.

This lovely picture was exhibited in 1850 at the Portland Gallery already referred to as under the same auspices as the two exhibitions that were held at Hyde Park Corner. In the catalogue it was entered as "No. 225, *Ecce Ancilla Domini*," and priced at £50; and as by this time Rossetti had left the studio in Cleveland Street where he painted *The Girlhood of the Virgin*, and taken one more suitable at 72 Newman Street, Oxford Street, the latter address was appended to the other particulars. The picture was either bought at the time or has since come into the possession of Mr. William Graham, who owns so many drawings and paintings by Rossetti, Holman Hunt, and Burne Jones.

The main colour of this composition is white, but blue and rich crimson wonderfully add to the general effect of lucency; and it is wrought in such exquisite lightness, delicacy, and beauty as to deserve the highest praise that Mr. Ruskin or any one else could bestow upon it. It seems to me to stand alone amongst this artist's works for perfect clarity, and has even less of the early Italian Gothicism than *The Girlhood of the Virgin*; certainly, whatever other merits his subsequent work may possess, none dwell in such an atmosphere of light. There is great severity, rigidity in form, but the excellence of the "three colours of Preraphaelitism" would nullify still more serious drawbacks. Mr. Ruskin refers to it as differing from every previous conception of the scene

known to him, in representing the angel as awakening the Virgin from sleep to give her his message; but in his subsequent remarks as to the angel's non-recognisability as such, "not depending for recognition of his supernatural character on the insertion of bird's wing's at his shoulders," or in being "neither transparent in body, luminous in presence, nor auriferous in apparel," he, while noting the pale yellow flames about his feet, surely forgot to note the aureole that radiates round his head—though, on the other hand, it may be that he referred only to personal and not to external signs. The Virgin, clothed in white, is sitting up in her white pallet-bed and reclining forward with eyes still awestruck with the premonitory dream that foretold her of God's will; she seems to look backwards into the mystery that came to her in sleep with a yearning questioning as to reality or non-reality as affecting herself, and forwards into the dim future with the awe of some great thing she can yet scarce comprehend in its significance. Unseen to her, the divine messenger with calm grave face and clothed simply in white, aureoled, and upborne, while apparently standing on the floor, by pale golden flames just reaching above his feet, stands looking at her, having through her sleep spake the message he came to give; and in his hand is a stem bearing Annunciation lilies, just over which is poised in downward flight the dove of the Holy Spirit. In front of her simple pallet there is an upright piece of crimson cloth in a wooden frame, and worked downwards in it a very rigid but exactly delineated white lily-branch; and behind her and the white pillow on her bed there is a light square curtain of deep cerulean blue, exquisite

as anything not Nature's own production can be. To the left of this curtain-screen, there is the semicircular window-space, wherethrough the scented air can enter freely; but nothing is visible through it save the clear blue Syrian morning sky and the leafy crown of a single palm. On the ledge of the window, above Mary's head, is a lamp with a flame still burning, but seeming quite white owing to the clear subdued radiance of fulfilled dawn. The drawback to this otherwise exquisite piece of workmanship is its prevailing angularity and uprightness, in the angel, in the embroidery-screen, in the curtain, and, in Mr. Ruskin's words, in "the severe foreshortening of the Virgin herself;" though at the time of its exhibition this was a minor matter compared to the heresy of deviation from sacred tradition *in re* representation of angels and madonnas, and from the traditional choice of time and surroundings for the Annunciation, as also in its realistic tendencies. I confess I can only partially agree with Mr. Ruskin in considering the *Ecce Ancilla Domini* a realistic representation of what actually *did* occur in the dwelling of the Nazarene carpenter, for, though doubtless succeeding better in this than those "jewellers of the fifteenth century" who set the example that became stereotyped, the room, with its screen and embroidery and other surroundings, cannot well be regarded as a probable representation of the very humble abode and corresponding method of life we are taught and infer from Biblical and secular history as likely to appertain to a poor carpenter in a poor, if naturally well-provided, district. But these, after all, are minor points, and are forgotten or put aside when looking at the pure colours and the solemn

significance of this most lovely and memorable picture. Its *motif* was given in the same sonnet as was printed in the catalogue recording *The Girlhood of the Virgin*, of which picture it is indeed a successor; so that while the first two-thirds of the sonnet may be taken as applicable to the earlier work the concluding three and a half lines refer to the *Annunciation* :—

. . . "Till one dawn, at home,  
She woke in her white bed, and had no fear  
At all,—yet wept till sunshine, and felt awed;  
Because the fulness of the time was come."

In the same year and in the same gallery there was also exhibited a water-colour drawing entitled *Giotto Painting Dante's Portrait*, an important and highly-finished design, now in the possession of Mr. J. P. Seddon. In addition to its great interest as a design, this picture, early water-colour as it is, is a very notable composition as to colour, and must always rank high amongst the compositions of this period. This year also Rossetti painted, but did not exhibit, a small square water-colour called *Morning Music*, which, however, its purchaser did not retain long, for it soon got into the hands of a well-known art-dealer, from whom in due course it was purchased by Mr. William Graham, its present proprietor, the first thing of the painter's, if I am not mistaken, which the latter gentleman ever saw. The subject is the morning toilet of an Italian lady of the mediæval period; the figure is half-length, and the fair rounded face is in full, while behind is a tire-woman combing out the long golden hair of her mistress; while to the right of the lady, in an easy stooping posture, is the husband, lover, or troubadour, who is stringing his lute, bringing

out therefrom the Morning Music which gives its name to the drawing.

To this and the preceding year belongs likewise the pencil drawing, the triptych *Dante and Beatrice*, one portion of which has been at least twice painted in water-colour, — the original study being in the possession of Mr. George Rae. It is a drawing of very great beauty, especially the right division, below which are the words *E cui saluta fà tremar lo core*. This delineates Dante's famous meeting with Beatrice when her salutation so overcame him by its exceeding grace and kindness. The face of the poet here more distinctly assimilates to the Giotto portrait than on any other occasion. The left division, the meeting beside a field of lilies in Paradise of Dante and Beatrice has the line *Guardami ben; ben son, ben son Beatrice* beneath it. Between the two compartments is a figure of Love, in his right hand holding the down-turned torch, and in his left a dialplate recording the fatal hour of the 9th of June 1290; above this most unconventional Love being the words *Ita n'è Beatrice in alto cielo*, and beneath it these others *Ed ha lasciato AMOR meco dolente*. The exact title of the whole work is *Il Saluto di Beatrice*; the right compartment having been drawn in 1849 and the left in 1850.

In 1851 Rossetti made the first design, either in ink or in pencil, of the strange *How They Met Themselves*. This design was either lost or destroyed, and it was not till some years later — namely, in 1860 — that he completed the drawing as it is now known; this, a beautifully-finished composition in ink, was executed at Paris. Four years later he painted on commission a replica of it in water-colour,

and though this is the one I shall describe, it is not, in my opinion, so fine as the highly-finished black-and-white drawing of 1860 belonging to Mr. George Price Boyce. But as 1851 is the date in which the conception was first harboured, under this date I will describe it instead of in order of chronological completion, though it must be remembered the drawing which is commonly spoken of is that of 1860, which was the one the artist had photographed for select private distribution.

It is one of the weirdest and most mysterious compositions of any painter since Blake or David Scott, and it is not at all improbable that the influence of at least one of these great artists had something to do with his choice of subject—choice of subject, for it is of course not the case, as I have heard alleged, that the conception was an original one, there being extant in Germany a well-known legend to the like effect. On the other hand, Rossetti at that time perhaps only heard the story in some vague form, which would naturally impress an imaginative mind like his, as, for instance, did the story as to Shelley's seeing his own double; but certainly later in life he was fully acquainted with the *Döppelgänger* superstition, which is now almost as familiar as that of the Wraith or that of the Were-Wolf.<sup>1</sup> Of the *glamour* that pervades this composition there is a kindred example in literature, mentioned in an article in the *London Quarterly* for 1868 on *Alexander Smith's Last Leaves*, where the writer, speaking of the mysterious beauty of Sydney Dobell's exquisite ballad *Keith of Ravelston* quotes

<sup>1</sup> I believe that he knew all these legendary fancies from early boyhood.

it, and adds, "We remember a picture by Dante Rossetti, called *How They Met Themselves*, which breathes the same mysterious import." Amongst other poems having the same *motif* the latest and one of the finest is Mr. Theodore Watt's subtle and highly imaginative sonnet that attracted so much attention on its appearance in the *Athenæum* a year or two ago,—the sonnet, namely, called *Foreshadowings* ("The Stars in the River"), which Rossetti himself pronounced to be the most original of all the versions of the *Döppelgänger* legend, and which he vaguely talked of transferring to canvas or paper whenever opportunity and ability concurred.<sup>1</sup>

The time is towards twilight, in a thick and presumably lonely wood where two lovers have met by secret appointment. They have stopped to embrace, hidden from the world by the dark forest, from heaven by the roof of closely-interwoven branches and dense foliage, when suddenly they behold *themselves* walk towards and past them. The two supernatural figures have nothing to denote their immortality save a gleaming light along the line of their bodies, not, however, visible to the lovers: with clasped hands they approach

<sup>1</sup> Readers will remember Poe's *William Wilson*, and some may recall Shelley's well-known lines in *Prometheus Unbound* :—

"The Magus Zoroaster, my dead child,  
Met his own image walking in the garden.  
That apparition, sole of men, he saw.  
For know, there are two worlds of life and death,  
One, that which thou beholdest; but the other  
Is underneath the earth, where do inhabit  
The shadows of all things that think and live,  
Dreams of light imaginings of men,  
And all that faith creates or love desires,  
Terrible, strange, sublime, or monstrous shapes."

and slowly pass on, the lady looking right into the eyes of her mortal double, and the man with a fixed and terrible expression staring back the startled gaze of the lover. The lady of life, if she may be so called in contradistinction, falls fainting against a tree with her face deathly pale with sudden fear and horror, and her lover, with his left arm supporting her, with his right draws his sword in order to make trial of this strange double of himself—but for some reason his arm seems paralysed, and he cannot raise his weapon. This is the moment chosen for illustration: in another, the lovers will be alone again, shuddering with fear at the occult significance of this strange and unnatural meeting with, to all intents, themselves. In the water-colour drawing the dresses or cloaks of the real and the supernatural ladies are green with dark shades throughout, the tunics of the men dark with dull red hose, their caps of lake with blue feathers, and around the neck of each is a small hunting-horn on a chain. There is something intensely fascinating about this design, permeated as it is with the very spirit of weird imagination; the story it opens up, for one thing, containing such dramatic possibilities. The half-shrinking half-defiant attitude of the lover is well rendered, and the living "lifelessness" of the fainting lady particularly fine; while the drawing of the "doubles" is in every way excellent. The strange and mysterious power of the design is undoubtedly mainly due to the reality of the lovers' vision; it is no ghost-seeing: they are not confronted with *apparitions*, but with realities like themselves, literally *themselves*. In the faces there is greater likeness preserved between the female than the male.



Either in this year, 1851, or that following, Rossetti composed a design nominally founded on some verses by Henry Taylor, now Sir Henry. It shows that interpretive blended with creative faculty referred to while mentioning the designs for the Tennyson quarto, that choice of an objective subject resulting in a subjective representation. The details added to the pictorial composition add greatly to its significance, details unmentioned in the poem. The illustrated verses run as follows:—

“Quoth tongue of neither maid nor wife  
To heart of neither wife nor maid,  
‘Lead we not here a jolly life  
Betwixt the shine and shade?’

“Quoth heart of neither maid nor wife  
To tongue of neither wife nor maid,  
‘Thou wag’st, but I am sore with strife  
And feel like flowers that fade.’”<sup>1</sup>

The sketch is a highly-finished pen-and-ink, and could easily have been enlarged to an oil picture, but, though the artist often intended to do this, I am not aware that he ever accomplished anything beyond two fine but small water-colour replicas. The centre of the drawing is occupied by a kind of sofa or couch, on or close to which are four figures, two gamblers and their mistresses; a square massive stool in front of the sofa serves for a table, on which the men are throwing the dice, one gamester sitting with crossed legs on the sofa, and the other, to the left, kneeling beside his Rose of yesterday, who gives the name to the design, *Hesterna Rosa*. The latter

<sup>1</sup> The song sung by Elena in the second part of *Philip van Artevelde* (Act v. Sc. 1).

gambler is still sufficiently enamoured of his mistress to be susceptible to her touch, for though intent on the throw his companion is about to make he lifts her left hand to his mouth to kiss it. But her face is averted, and covered by her right hand; some sudden memory of past purity and girlhood having perhaps been struck by the low lute-music made by a young serving-girl or innocent sister beside her: her companion in misfortune, however, is either beyond or reckless of the past, and with an ungirlish song on her lips leans over the sofa clasping both arms around the neck of her lover. Both women are crowned with flowers, but they are wreaths such as Bacchantes might have worn; and beyond, on the right, a hideous ape is scratching itself, adding by its presence a significant type of degradation. From a very good photograph in my possession I notice that the design of the kneeling gamester's sleeves is very similar to that used about six years later in the lover's robe in the famous *Mary Magdalene* drawing. *Hesterna Rosa* is signed simply "Dante Rossetti," and was exhibited some five or six years later in the small exhibition of Prerafaelite painters, held at 4 Russell Place, Fitzroy Square, and is now, I believe, in the possession of its first owner, Mr. F. G. Stephens.

Subsequently, in 1865, a water-colour was made from the same design, concerning which the artist wrote to the purchaser, Mr. Frederick Craven, "The scene represented is a pleasure tent, at the close of a night's revel, now growing to dawn. . . . The effect is that of a lamplight interior towards dawn, when (or in twilight also) all objects seem purely and absolutely blue by the contact with the warm light

within." This belongs to Mr. Frederick Craven, and was lately exhibited in Manchester. Later still a larger and somewhat finer water-colour replica was executed, and to this was given the title *Elena's Song*.

To 1851 also belongs the small water-colour called *Borgia*, a fine composition and full of character, especially in the instances of the Duke and the Pope, the colours also being subdued and harmonious. It is really an elaboration of a small rough pen-and-ink sketch of the preceding year, wherein a lady reclines on a couch in the same attitude as Borgia, while in front two demure young people, a page and a girl, dance with quaint posturing; the motto or name for the design being the appropriate lines—

"To caper nimbly in a lady's chamber  
To the lascivious pleasing of a lute."

In the succeeding year Rossetti painted the first of the two water-colours referred to in connection with the *Dante and Beatrice* triptych; it is that forming the left division, entitled *Guardami ben : ben son, ben son Beatrice*. The scene here represented is a wood at spring-time, the "new spring" of Paradise, with Dante meeting Beatrice; the latter, clothed in a long green mantle over a red dress, has come forward seeing his approach, accompanying her being two damsels both dressed in deep blue and with citherns in their hands: while round the head of each, interpretive of their heavenly condition, is a subdued halo, Beatrice in addition being crowned with laurel. She is in advance of her attendants, and draws back her veil in order to look right into the face of Dante, who steadfastly returns the gaze, he being clothed with a purple-brown cloak over a green robe and with a laurel wreath

around his velvet hood. A replica of this drawing was made in 1864 for Mr. Graham, and is much the more finished of the two, the colours at the same time being noticeably less crude.

At this time (1852) also was painted the interesting and thoroughly individual drawing *Hail, thou that art highly favoured amongst women*, once, I believe, belonging to Mr. Ruskin, and now in the possession of Mr. Boyce. On the lower portion of the frame are also the words, *My Beloved is mine and I am his: He feedeth amongst the lilies*. There is an almost uniform colour of light green, formed by the fresh delicate foliage and the moist region wherein the water-lilies grow; in the midst of the latter a figure stoops, and standing under the trees is an angel, winged, and looking like a green flower himself. Despite its faulty execution it has a very great charm, such a charm as no verbal description can give, and which, perhaps, in itself might after all appeal to but a few. I am surprised the artist did not subsequently attempt an oil or large water-colour elaborated reproduction, but like many of his most charming and characteristic designs it never reached either stage. Such a design was that belonging to the following year, one which he often intended to reproduce in oil, but of which there was never, so far as I am aware, even made a replica; this was entitled *The Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice*, sometimes called *Dante surprised while Painting the Angel for Beatrice*, and is in the possession of Mrs. Combe of Oxford, whose late husband was the original purchaser. It is a highly-finished and finely-painted drawing, over which a great amount of care and time must have been taken: Dante himself kneels beside a window opening on the Arno, and

turns round at the greeting of untimely visitors, one of whom leans forward eager with introductions. The room is quaintly ornamented with a row along the top of carved heads such as seraphim are represented with, and behind the open door a glimpse is caught of a green woodland or garden, forming a charming contrast to the view seen from the window where the blue Arno washes the white walls of the Florentine palaces. In one hand Dante holds the drawing on which he has been interrupted, and his face has a grave severity as he turns to look on those who have entered. There were a few photographs privately taken of this drawing, but they were not successful, and this early and important work is little known even amongst the few who are comparatively familiar with Rossetti's work. The words from the *Vita Nuova* which it illustrates are as follows:<sup>1</sup> "On that day which fulfilled the year since my lady had been made of the citizens of eternal life, I sat in a place apart, where remembering me of her, I was drawing an angel upon certain tablets. And as I drew, I turned my eyes and saw beside me persons to whom it was fitting to give honour, and who were looking at what I did; also, as it was told me afterwards, they had been there a while before I perceived them. Perceiving whom, I arose, and saluting them, said: 'Another was present with me.'"

There are also three small but interesting pen-and-ink sketches belonging to this period, in one of which, half in caricature half in earnest, he delineates himself

<sup>1</sup> I have not taken the rendering of this passage as given by Mr. Rossetti in *Dante and his Circle* (p. 95), but rather the early translation made at the time specially for the drawing.

sitting either as a model or for his portrait to his wife, then Miss Siddall; but as far as likeness goes the only thing that can be traced is a strong resemblance to the well-known etching of Méryon, as he sits up with dishevelled hair on his wretched pallet. Another is that of his mother, and similar in size is the third sketch, which is a portrait of the artist himself carefully drawn before the glass, finished with extreme care, delicacy, and exactness, and for which a well-known publisher offered the possessor of it an almost inordinate sum, considering all things. These two latter drawings belong to one of the friends who did Rossetti the service after his wife's death referred to in the first chapter, Mr. Charles A. Howell; and the same gentleman owns the drawing of Miss Siddall made in 1858 or 1859, shortly before her marriage.

Some few pages back I referred to the great charm the poetry of Robert Browning at this period had upon Rossetti, a charm that though it did not engender imitation induced extreme appreciation, which the latter tried to find a vent for in pictorial illustration. About this time (1853) he set himself in earnest about two great paintings, one of which had for its subject a scene in Browning's masterpiece, or at least what Rossetti, amongst others, considered his masterpiece, *Pippa Passes*; but after persistence reaching over a period of many months, indeed of years, the result was only disastrous failure, the technical difficulties proving in this instance insurmountable. These difficulties were not in the colouring, a process that came naturally to Rossetti, but in the *drawing*, an obstacle that stood in the artist's way from his earliest days to the final mature decade: indeed, it cannot be denied that

the drawing in many compositions, especially the early water-colours and drawings, is boyish in its inefficiency; an unfortunate truth resulting from want of discipline in this important essential at the outset of his career. Rossetti may be said to have succeeded in the main at last after almost insuperable difficulties, and made himself what he often despaired of being possible; but at this period it was nothing short of absolute despair that took hold of him, indomitable perseverance and confidence in his otherwise extraordinary powers enabling him to triumph in the end.

The song of *Kate the Queen* will be remembered in *Pippa Passes*, and it is this song which gave the title to the painting in question, the scene represented being an imaginary one where the maids are all working at their seams and the page sits singing; no sketch even of the complete picture exists however, and hence no further description can now be given; the satisfaction to set against this being in the fact that the destruction of the painting was probably the wisest thing the artist could do, seeing its faults as he did. A portion of it, however, is preserved in the interesting picture belonging to Mr. J. F. Hutton entitled *Two Mothers*; this being a small composition in oil.<sup>1</sup>

In common with *Kate the Queen*, another large painting was referred to as having been commenced in 1853; not this time suggested by any poem of Mr. Browning's, but by one of Mr. William Bell Scott's,

<sup>1</sup> This, I must state, is only conjectural. It is almost certain that *Two Mothers* has some connection with *Kate the Queen*, but it may simply have been founded on some studies therefor, and not really have formed a portion of the large painting itself. At the same time, one or two friends of the artist's youth regard the latter as the case, including Mr. Madox Brown.

the well-known ballad called *Mary Anne*, and originally published as *Rosabel*. This ballad had made a great impression upon Rossetti's mind, especially (for illustrative purposes) the verses supplying the central idea of *Found*, the name of this second great painting, which, however, had not the disastrous ending of the first, though after thirty years' probation it still remains uncompleted though far advanced. Either at this date or considerably later Rossetti finished a water-colour of the same subject, though differing in details, which I will refer to again in 1861, the year preceding its exhibition in Edinburgh—the drawing in question being *The Farmer's Daughter*, mentioned a few pages back.

In Mr. Graham's possession there is a very interesting and richly coloured if somewhat crude early drawing, dated 1854, called variously *Arthur's Tomb* and *The Last Meeting of Lancelot and Guinevere*, the subject being taken from the well-known poem by William Morris. Over the tomb of the great prince, surrounded by green trees and undergrowth, mourns Guinevere, clad as a nun, in her bitter repentance; while across the carven stone head Lancelot, armed and ready for departure, stoops to kiss her over the effigy of his dead friend, the still crowned queen, however, repelling him from what would alike disgrace her vows and the memory of the quiescent dead. About this time, or possibly in 1852, was painted the small water-colour, *Francesca da Rimini*, more noteworthy than the last both for colour and dramatic yet non-obtrusive effect; the period chosen being the famous moment when the perilous volume is laid down, and the lips of the lovers meet in sudden passionate love.



Francesca is clad in a soft green garment, and beside her sits Paolo in a robe of subdued crimson with the book falling from his knee as he turns to embrace her whom he loved, while behind and in front of them pink and red roses grow in clusters from dark wooden tubs. Above them is the ominous crest of the lord of Rimini, an evil-looking griffin, with the inscription "Malatesta," and just seen in front of the heavy curtains is a single foot—sufficient to tell that Francesca's husband has ascended the stairs and come upon them unseen, and that he has in his hand the gift to the lovers of death and eternal sorrow. This is a beautiful little drawing, full of subdued and harmonious hues, and pregnant with the spirit of the doom that is at hand. That Rossetti at this time was very unequal in the work that came from his hands is seen, for instance, in another water-colour also belonging to 1854, the very "Preraphaelite" and mannered *Roman de la Rose*. About this time (very likely in 1855, though it is undated, and I can find no exact record of it) he composed in pen and ink the important design for a picture called *Hamlet and Ophelia*, a design which had decided elements of pictorial success, but which never reached anything beyond a small though beautiful water-colour rendering of the same size.<sup>1</sup> Hamlet and Ophelia are in some outer room of the palace facing a court, the room or balcony or boudoir having quaint furniture, evidently drawn from actual models, and with drawn-back curtains which would otherwise shut out the court from view, beyond which are the massive battlements of Elsinore with curved

<sup>1</sup> With some material differences. *Vide* the water-colour described under date 1866.

double flight of stairs reaching them from below, stairs certainly of a thoroughly original pattern and remarkably out of perspective. On the battlements two or three soldiers are moving about, and from a stone window in a turret in the left-hand corner two figures, the king and queen, look unseen on the interview taking place beneath them. Ophelia is sitting in a high carved chair, dressed simply, and with no signs of mental distress save sorrow and gentle protestation, while standing near her, with arms outstretched along the balcony, is the "Prince of Denmark," dressed wholly in a plain black robe sufficiently monastic to have enabled its wearer to pass as one in the service of religion, save for the long heavy-hilted sword at his side. The scene represented is from Scene 1 Act iii. of Shakespeare's great play, and shows Ophelia in the act of returning the presents and letters given to her by Hamlet, which the latter still denying she turns her head away, but still holds out to him his gifts in sad remonstrance; Hamlet with his right hand plucks and tears the rose leaves from a thick bush growing alongside and over the balcony, and looks down with a peculiar expression upon his unfortunate betrothed. On the right hand of Ophelia there is a stone alcove containing two volumes and a large crucifix, and in the extreme left of the design the flush rose-tree from which Hamlet plucks at random. This is beyond question a most original rendering of a much hackneyed subject, reflecting neither previous conceptions on canvas nor on the stage, although within the last few years a resemblance, in the *spirit* of the conception, may with some reason have been traced by some between the Hamlet of Rossetti in 1855 and the Hamlet of Irving

in the "seventies." The highly interesting drawing, *The Lovers*, was painted at this time,<sup>1</sup> and has changed hands in a manner infrequent with Rossetti's compositions, which are owned by a comparative few, and seldom parted with; in this instance the first possessor was Mr. Ford Madox Brown, the second Mr. Windus, the third Mr. Plint, at whose decease it was purchased by its present owner, Mr. H. Virtue Tebbs. It is sometimes called *Carlisle Wall*, from the motto line, "The sun shines red on Carlisle Wall;" and the scene is that of two lovers, a knight and a girl, on a castle-turret of red brick. The colours are strong but harmonious, and the drawing, which is a small one, is charged with that unmistakable and fascinating poetic emotion manifest in so many of the early water-colours of this artist. To 1855 belong also the famous water-colour *Dante's Dream* and the small water-colours *La Belle Dame Sans Mercy* and *Fazio's Mistress*. Two years later the first of these, with its companion piece *The Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice*, was exhibited at a private gallery in 4 Russell Place, Fitzroy Square, and attracted great admiration amongst the few who believed in the small band known as the Preraphaelites; the exhibition, though small, being by no means unimportant, considering that on its walls were the productions (seventy-two pictures and drawings according to the *Saturday Review*) of such men as Millais, Rossetti, Holman Hunt, Ford Madox Brown, Arthur Hughes, Inchbold, Collins, John Brett, the late Thomas Seddon, William Davis, W. L. Windus, and others. But though deserving of high praise, it falls very far short of the magnificent oil painting of the

<sup>1</sup> 1853.

same name now in Liverpool, in details, in character, and especially in colour, though I am aware there are some who prefer the earlier work, for what reason I am at a loss to understand. The full title is *Dante's Dream at the time of the Death of Beatrice*, the explanatory words from the *Vita Nuova* being "Then Love said unto me: 'It is true that our lady lieth dead.' And so strong was this idle imagining, that it made me to behold my lady in death; whose face certain ladies seemed to be covering with a white veil; and who was so humble of her speech, that it was as though she said, 'I have attained to look on the beginning of peace.' And I saw in heaven a multitude of angels who were returning upwards, having before them an exceedingly white cloud."<sup>1</sup> As I shall have occasion to describe this picture again in its supreme form, I shall only in this instance notify differences. Thus, in the water-colour there are no strange crimson birds as in the Liverpool picture, no scroll with significant Scriptural words, no lamp with dying flame; while Love, instead of being clad in a garment of "flame-colour, is in one of brilliant blue with green shades throughout, the live green colours of the two ladies lifting the canopy from Beatrice being in too strong a contrast with the blue of Love. The faces, moreover, are different from those of the later work, and by no means so attractive, though to some that of Dante might be more agreeable owing to the closer resemblance it has to the portrait by Giotto. Besides being exhibited at Russell Place (where also, in addition to the *Anniversary* drawing, were *Hesterna Rosa*, *Mary Magdalene*, and

<sup>1</sup> See the much finer rendering of a later period in *Dante and his Circle*, p. 70.

*The Blue Closet*), it was on view the following year (1858) at the Liverpool Academy Exhibition, in common, as has already been mentioned, with *The Wedding of St. George* and *A Christmas Carol*. *La Belle Dame sans Mercy* does not, as one would infer from the name, suggest at once the beautiful ballad of Keats, though I believe such was its origin; but it is certainly not amongst the most successful of the early water-colours. *Fazio's Mistress* is a much more interesting drawing; readers of *Dante and His Circle* will remember the exquisite lines by Fazio Degli Uberti in praise of his lady, Angiola of Verona, and it is this Fazio, of course, that is meant; the lines forming the *motif* of the drawing being, *Io miro i crespi ed i biondi capegli, Dei quali ha fatto per me rete Amore*—"I look at the crisp golden-threaded hair, whereof, to thrall my heart, Love twists a net." Mr. George Rae has an interesting water-colour of this date, entitled *Chapel before the Lists*, markedly in the artist's early manner, but suggestive and possessing decided charm; and, as far as I can be certain, it was either now or in 1857-8 that *The Sprinkling of Blood on the Lintels, with Mary gathering the bitter herbs for the Passover*, was designed. The words of Mr. Ruskin in reference to this drawing will be remembered. The drawing itself, if I am not mistaken, was once in the ownership of Mr. Ruskin, and now belongs to the Taylor Museum in Oxford; the scene, in the artist's own words, being "in the house-porch, where Christ holds a bowl of blood, from which Zacharias is sprinkling the posts and lintel. Joseph has brought the lamb, and Elizabeth lights the pyre. The shoes which John fastens, and the bitter herbs which Mary is gathering, form part of the ritual."

There are, or were, three important drawings which can more or less accurately be dated about this period, but of which I can find no exact record. One was the design entitled *St. Luke*, for which the artist wrote two fine sonnets, the other<sup>1</sup> was the pencil drawing for which the lines in the *Poems* called *Aspæta Medusa* were written, where over a pool of water Andromeda bends and looks in safety upon the Gorgon's head which Perseus holds so that its fatal face is visible but only "mirrored in the wave;" and the third was the *St. Cecily*, of which the well-known writer, whose pseudonym was "Shirley," spoke many years ago as actually glowing with colour, "with such a glow of gold and amethyst as sometimes burns upon the sunset Atlantic."

In 1857 I find Rossetti executed a good deal of work, some of it very important. Besides finishing the *Passover* drawing just mentioned, this was the year in which the artist also completed the five designs which were engraved for the Tennyson quarto, and when he, amongst others, painted the walls of the Oxford Union Debating Room. There is also a water-colour, bearing date 1857, called *The Meeting of Sir Tristram and Yseult*, and I have seen five or six others of the same period, viz.—*Fra Pace*, *Sir Galahad*, *The Blue Closet*, *Sanct Grael*, *The Tune of Seven Towers*, and *The Death of Breuse sans Pitie*; of these the last four, in common with two other drawings (the *Paolo and Francesca* and the *Chapel before the Lists*), were painted for Mr. William Morris, the author of *The Earthly Paradise*, from whom, in 1864, they were purchased by Mr. George Rae. Of these Rossetti subsequently

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* entry in Supplementary Catalogue (1860).

requested for "improvement" the last named, but the result was so unsatisfactory that Mr. Rae wisely resisted many frequent after-requests to retouch the others. *Sir Galahad* is a replica in colour of the fine design described near the beginning of this chapter, forming the fifth illustration to Tennyson's *Poems*, and was exhibited the same year in the private gallery at Russell Place. *The Blue Closet* and *The Tune of Seven Towers* were not, as might be inferred from their names, suggested by passages in the similarly titled poems by Mr. William Morris but themselves suggested the latter. Of these the latter seems to me more grotesque than beautiful; but *The Blue Closet* is pretty and harmonious, the four "damozels wearing purple and green" singing "in the closet blue" their one song on Christmas eve, while in front of them grows up through the floor an orange lily, "with a patch of earth from the land of the dead." The *Sanct Grael* is interesting both in itself and as the early study of the oil known as *The Damsel of the Sancgrael*, and has the vague charm so characteristic of the early water-colours. That Rossetti at twenty painted *The Girlhood of the Virgin* and the *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, and that Rossetti in his thirtieth year painted *The Tune of Seven Towers* and the *Death of Breuse* seems a contradiction of likelihood. These 1857 drawings, notwithstanding, possess a peculiar interest, as, though deficient in technical merit, they are intensely and peculiarly poetic, and are thoroughly individual, representative also of a phase through which the mind of the artist passed several times. He himself was quite conscious subsequently of their faults, as seen by his almost invariable desire of retouching, which at

times amounted to repainting; but he always had an affection, based on the poetic sentiment, for what he termed his romantic in opposition to his later imaginative period. To some it is the violent contrasts of colour that are unpleasant, to others the real or apparent affected grotesqueness or quaintness, but to some, willing to overlook these drawbacks, there is great and ceaseless charm in these designs, of which it may be remarked *The Death of Breuse sans Pitie*—as it now appears, at any rate, after its retouchment—is the crudest in colour and most grotesque in treatment. *Fra Pace* is an extremely interesting small water-colour in the artist's early manner, showing more directly than anything else I remember the influence of Van Eyck and Memmeling, from whom he is supposed to have learned so much, and whom he certainly at one time greatly admired. The "Brother" is in a loft, painting a missal on a desk, down which are slung six phials containing respectively emerald, carmine, blue, purple, red, and yellow pigments, with close at hand on a shelf a sliced pomegranate; while behind the friar is a boy tickling a cat seated on the former's trailing robe, and in front from a hollow in the floor a rose-tree blooms, with overhead a bell, the rope belonging to which hangs down past the steps leading to the loft, beyond the steps a glimpse being caught of forest greenery. The drawing of this composition is sometimes inefficient, especially about the bed in the background, but the double charm of colour and interest is certainly not wanting. It was, I was told, the first artistic work of Rossetti at which his friend Burne Jones saw him engaged, and this was on the occasion of a visit of the latter, then a young undergraduate, to the older artist



just previous to Rossetti's going to Oxford himself for the painting of the "Union."

There was a remarkable "drawing together" of sympathetic minds in this famous undertaking, the leading architect and the leading artist, moreover, both being markedly original. Dante Rossetti was the acknowledged inspiring influence amongst the small band of young painters who voluntarily gave their services towards what was in two cases a first good opportunity of public exhibition, these two being Val. Prinsep and E. Burne Jones, though the latter had already executed designs for the stained glass in Bradfield College, Berks. The subjects chosen by the last-mentioned artists were *Merlin being lured into the pit by the Lady of the Lake*, and *Nimue bringing Sir Peleus to Ettarde after their quarrel*; while amongst the other earliest decorative designs were *King Arthur receiving the Sword Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake*, by J. H. Pollen (already known by his painting of the roof of Merton Chapel); *Arthur conveyed by weeping Queens to Avalon after his death*, by Arthur Hughes; *Sir Palomides' jealousy of Sir Tristram and Iseult*, by William Morris, who also painted the roof; and *Sir Lancelot asleep before the shrine of the Sancgrael*, by Dante Rossetti. The general effect of glowing colours may be imagined, rich blues, purples, greens, and reds being predominant—indeed only one of the so-called frescoes was in consistently dark hues, namely, that by Mr. Hughes, where the scene is in partly moonlit darkness; but unpleasant effects of contrast were avoided by its being at one end of the room, facing the design by Mr. Pollen, richer in colour certainly than Mr. Hughes',

but more subdued in tone than the other mural paintings. It was originally intended both by the artist himself and by the Committee that Rossetti should paint one and perhaps two more "frescoes," but this never came about; indeed the *Sir Lancelot before the Shrine of the Sancgrael* remains still with an unfinished "patch" in the foreground; but this does not, however, represent his whole actual work at Oxford, he having also made a design of Arthur sitting at table with his knights, which design was carven in stone and coloured by Mr. Monro, and is now in the tympanum of the porch. Altogether the result of the first half-dozen wall-paintings was looked upon as a daring innovation in the introduction of non-architectural style and colour in conjunction with architectural surroundings; in the words of a contemporary notice, "the result is a departure from precedent as indescribable as complete. Rossetti, whom Mr. Ruskin has pronounced to be the only modern rival of Turner as a colourist, must at least be allowed (whether we admit the rivalry or not) to equal Turner in one of the noblest and least attainable qualities of harmonious colour—viz. its mysteriousness; of which quality the apparition of the *Damsel of the Sancgrael* surrounded with angels, on the wall of the Union, is a remarkable example." In the same critique there is full recognition shown of the successful way in which the young painters "have observed the true conditions and limitations of architectural painting with a degree of skill scarcely to have been expected from their inexperience in this kind of work." The writer is himself evidently a "Romanticist," "Preraphaelite," or "Protester," for his advocacy is thorough throughout, and his theory

as to mural painting not such as was then recognised in England, or indeed elsewhere; for, after acknowledging that an indefiniteness of outline (adding, however, that such does not imply any general dissolution of form) is a necessary result of Rossetti's colour-method, he goes on to say that this indefiniteness is all the more suited for architectural painting owing to its relieving the general effect of absolute definiteness of outline characteristic of architecture, a definiteness that had hitherto always been emulated rather than relieved. But the writer's confident anticipations as to their lasting success as regards colour-endurance were not well founded, for in a comparatively short period the colours began to lose their brilliancy and later to fade still more decisively; Mr. Gullick and Mr. Timbs, in their popular treatise on painting, being nearer the mark in their prophecy that "as the paintings are in distemper, not fresco, we have no great confidence in their permanency." They were not even in distemper, however—the paints being laid on the brick walls in a way that would have astounded the old fresco painters; and that the result has been proved to be unsatisfactory has for a considerable time past been fully recognised, but of late especially the ravages of time or damp or both have been more marked, and when I saw them a few months ago much of the work throughout was virtually destroyed,—here and there indeed a fine piece of colour still remained, but there was little coherency of form and a general decay in tone. They were, as I have said, simply painted on the brick, which, with the easily atmospherically-affected nature of the friable Oxford stone, doubtless fully accounts for their ulti-

mate unfortunate condition. Their execution was entirely a labour of love in so far as remuneration was concerned, but the expenses of the young artists at the hotel where they sojourned were defrayed,—by no means, in the opinion of the Committee, such a small matter as one might think owing to the decidedly non-anchoritic tastes of the enthusiastic painters. I remember Rossetti always used to refer to the matter with a quiet laugh, adding that he thought it would be a lesson to the Committee to rather pay a definite sum and leave the artists to meet their hotel expenses themselves. As to the subject of the latter's "fresco," it will be remembered that when Lancelot came to the shrine of the Holy Grail he could not enter because of his forbidden love for Guinevere, and being full of sorrow and fatigue lay down before it in a deep sleep; and it is a dream or vision during this sleep that is the subject of the fresco. He sees the Queen herself regarding him half with love and half with triumph, clad in raiment of glowing colours, and with arms intertwining with the branches of an apple-tree, a symbolical allusion that will be at once comprehended; while beyond the interposing figure of Guinevere appears in the air the mysterious figure of the Damsel of the Sancgrael, holding the sacred chalice for him unobtainable, and herself surrounded by angels. The colours are, or rather were, rich and beautiful, and were laid on with an elaborate skill and care, but the drawing was bad. I have heard Rossetti blamed for not fulfilling the original intention as to painting other "frescoes," and also for never having completed the one he did execute; the latter he himself regretted, and often said in a vague way he should like to finally

touch up, but when he first learned of the improbable permanency of the mural paintings he hardly considered it worth while, and this, along with the unremunerated loss of time that would have resulted, amply accounts for his withdrawal from further work at the "Union."

There is another important water-colour of this date which I have forgotten to refer to, the composition called the *Gate of Memory*, and, like *Found*, based on some verses in Mr. W. Bell Scott's ballad *Rosabel*, or *Maryanne* as called subsequently in the reprint in 1854. The verses are those beginning

"On saunters Maryanne,  
Once a time the harvest-queen,"

and the specially illustrated lines are those in the next stanza,

"She leaned herself against the wall,  
And longed for drink to slake her thirst  
And in memory at once."

Like the girl in *Found*, she of the *Gate of Memory* is also an unfortunate "lost at twenty-five," and has paused in her wanderings in the city to which she was beguiled. She leans against a wall, the rich wealth of her uncovered hair shrouding her comely face, and round her ill-protected frame being a close-wrapt shawl; while between her and an archway, the Gate of Memory, in mid-arch of which hangs a yellow-flamed lamp, glides in the dismal dusk a large and evil-looking rat. She peers aside at the vision seen through the "Gate" (against a background of fine mansions lighted up) where is *herself* as a little girl seated flower-crowned with her young companions dancing and singing around her. This vision is

specially finely executed, is indeed more real in a sense than the poor woman herself; but the whole work is one of great beauty, and strongly impressive. Painted as it was in 1857, some subsequent final touches were given to it in 1864, and it is this latter date which the picture somewhat misleadingly bears.

I have already made mention of a water-colour drawing, entitled *A Christmas Carol*, having been exhibited at the Liverpool Academy in 1858, and I have seen a richly-coloured, though small, oil belonging to Mr. George Rae similarly named, but in date more probably the early "sixties." It is, however, just possible that it may have been painted in 1857 or early in the succeeding year, and have been the picture exhibited at Liverpool, its classification as a water-colour being simply a clerical error; but if so, it is the only oil I know of by Rossetti which was not preceded by a plain or coloured design other than the study.<sup>1</sup> This is a beautiful little work, possessing to a high degree that charm of colour permeated by sentiment so characteristic of the artist. A fair girlish woman with a "flower-like face" sits playing a two-stringed lute, on the upper end of which is a sprig of holly with scarlet berries; her dress is a curious robe with gold markings over a purple ground, the underside of which, upturned at the sleeves and the neck, is crimson while twisted round her supporting the lute is a pale-green delicate veil, and clasped close to the white throat itself

<sup>1</sup> Since writing the above I have found that Mr. James Leathart possesses the original drawing in water-colour, and that it bears date, Christmas 1857-1858. The small oil belonging to Mr. Rae was finished much later than the period where it is here described, that gentleman purchasing it from a dealer in 1877. There is also a *Christmas Carol* in tinted crayons, belonging to Mrs. Aglaia Coronio.

is a necklace of green emeralds; with behind all this exquisite and harmonious colouring a background of tinted and flowered wall, and hung thereon a metal oval with roughly moulded Virgin and Child. Her head is thrown slightly back, and her red lips are parted as she sings the *Song of Christ's Birth*, as quaintly narrated in the *Winchester Mysteries*.

In 1858 also were wrought two important designs, the one a water-colour called *Mary in the House of John*, and the other the famous *Mary Magdalene* drawing. There are two water-colours bearing the title of the former, one painted as just mentioned and one in 1859, but the earlier picture is very much the finer of the two, alike in colour and execution; it once, I believe, belonged to Mr. Loft, and is, or was lately, on view at the Galleries of the Fine Art Society in New Bond Street. The scene is an interior of a room, with an open window across which transverse bars form a cross, the view beyond consisting of the hilly slopes whereon the white dwellings of the Nazarenes cluster thickly; the purplish gleams of a calm twilight softening and beautifying every object. Mary and John are clothed in delicately-shaded greens and blues, the former standing close to the window and pouring oil from a small vessel into a lamp, while her sad womanly face is turned towards John sitting in front of her, who strikes a light from a flint; the actions by both, it need hardly be said, being directly symbolical. While both the water-colour pictures on this subject are beautiful, it is evident that the *feeling* was absent in that of 1859, the soft and chastened glow of colour, the definite drawing, and the magnetic earnestness of the personal delineations being much more noticeable

in the first work. This beautiful composition was suggested by some lines in the poet-artist's *Ave*, that lovely "hymn" so well known to readers of the *Poems*.

As full of charm in its own way is an exquisite little water-colour called *Golden Water*; a long and narrow composition, being about fourteen inches in height by seven in breadth. The subject is just such an one as Rossetti delighted to take in hand, something belonging to the realm of legend or of imagination; in the case of *Golden Water* to the latter, the subject being taken from the narrative in *The Arabian Nights* entitled *The Story of the Two Sisters who were jealous of their Younger Sister*. The portion therein chosen for illustration is that of the descent of the Princess Parizade from the mountain, with behind her the "Singing Tree," fluttering above her the "Talking Bird," and in her arms the barrel containing the "Golden Water;" the first of these being of emerald green with mauve blossom, and the second of pure scarlet. Her dress is of orange trimmed with green, and the long hair falling down her shoulders is of a dull-red auburn. Such pictures have, of course, only one end—that of appeal to the colour sense, hence to many they seem objectless and even frivolous; but to those who are sensitive to the charm of colour, a charm almost as indefinite as that of rare music, they are a source of pure and constant delight.

In 1857 was drawn in ink a tiny sketch of very great interest—the first committal to paper—namely, of the *Mary Magdalene* drawing, and valuable as showing how completely the picture dwelt in the artist's mind before undertaking the finished design. This belongs to Mr. C. A. Howell. Subse-



quent to the finished design, which I am about to describe, there was a replica made (though I may be mistaken as to the medium) in water-colour, which the artist himself considered much below the mark, and which was so, but which was executed only as a feeler to a large and important picture of the subject. It may be noted, however, that in the finished design itself the drawing is here and there exceedingly bad, as in the wall of Simon's house, the stairs leading thereto, and the entrance, and the room where Christ sits.

It was of the *Mary Magdalene* drawing that Ruskin, as I quoted in the last chapter, spoke so enthusiastically in the *Nineteenth Century* as being, in common with the *Passover* drawing and others from the life of Christ and the *Vita Nuova*, "of quite imperishable power and value." I was told that it was originally, or is now, in the possession of Mr. Ruskin, but for some time it belonged to the late Mr. Plint, at the sale of whose effects in 1862 it, with one or others, was reserved for the benefit of the family for future disposal. The full title is *Mary Magdalene at the door of Simon the Pharisee*, and those familiar with Rossetti's poetic work will recollect a very fine and dramatic interpretive sonnet on the same amongst the *Sonnets for Pictures*; the composition not being a water-colour, as it has once or twice been denominated in notices of his life-work since the artist's death, but simply a drawing, though a marvellously skilful and beautiful one. In 1859, or perhaps 1860, he began a large oil picture of the same, never, however, getting much beyond the head and neck and arms of the Magdalene; this, and the already mentioned sketch and replica, and a study of the head of Christ, and sometime

previous an elaborate drawing of the fawn plucking the vine-leaves, complete, if I am not mistaken, all Rossetti did in connection with this design.

The drawing is full of figures, and the difficult matter of grouping is managed with considerable skill and fidelity to nature. In the left is the house of Simon, with two open window spaces looking out into the narrow street, at one of which sits the Pharisee with his worldly sensual face, behind him being an attendant carrying a dish of somewhat for feast day, Simon himself looking with a face of half-indifference half-contempt at the Magdalene casting aside the joy of life in order to come to pay homage to the poor Nazarene Prophet at present his guest. The latter sits opposite him, with sad face full of thought and love and brooding care, and it is his glance that has arrested the beautiful Syrian girl as she hurries along in the festal procession, rose-crowned and with laughter on her lips; the model from which the face of Christ was drawn being, it may be of interest to some to know, Mr. Burne Jones. On the lowest of the stone steps leading up to the doorway sits a girl half-naked, with tangled hair and an incredulous jeering expression, herself one who has chosen a vicious life; and beside her strut fowls eager to pick up what falls from the wooden pottinger on her lap; and behind this unfortunate, underneath the window where Jesus sits sad-eyed, is a lovely fawn feeding upon the young and tender vine leaves. The roadway is of small rounded stones, with grass growing in tufts every here and there; and along the narrow street, beyond which a view is caught of a lake and white village, winds a festal procession, singing and laughing, while the warm

wind carries eddying overhead the joyous music of lutes and silver trumpets. From the midst of these Mary suddenly turns, her life touched in its inmost depths by the sorrowful brotherly love and yearning of Christ's eyes, and ascending the stairs would fain at once enter were it not that her lover and another following after interpose, and with mockery and entreaty by turns seek to persuade her not thus to leave a happiness within immediate reach. Fair faces look back upon her, some wondering, some laughingly remonstrating, but she stands on the steps with steadfast purpose, heedless alike of those in the procession, of the music and the feast, of the man who angrily tries to stop with outstretched arm her entrance to Simon's house, and of the lover scornful now and now persuasive, standing on the hither side of the steps. With upstretched arms she disentangles from her flowing hair the roses and other flowers that added to her loveliness, beginning then and there the new life that was to be filled with such bitterness of spirit, when ere very long darkness was to come down one memorable night and shroud three crosses upon the hill of Calvary.

This exquisite design was photographed privately, and through these few photographs it has been rendered better known than could well have been the case as long as it remained in private hands. The intricate workmanship of, for instance, the cloak of the lover, covered with a rich design, the drawing of the fawn, of the figure of Mary standing in all the loveliness of young and beautiful womanhood, her robe falling in folds, her girdle and strange palm-leaf fan, her wavy hair, and face almost as much like a flower as the

roses and lilies which her white hands seek to disentangle and throw away, is very good; though other bad drawing has just been referred to. The sunflower, for whose introduction into personal, mural, and embroider decoration Rossetti and Burne Jones are somewhat inconsequentially supposed to be responsible, here first in any picture by the former appears. Just within the threshold of the feast-room of Simon the Pharisee is on either side a narrow wooden pillared balcony, on one side being a large pot containing a tall lily, and on the other one with large and heavy sunflowers. It is greatly to be regretted that this memorable design never reached a stage of completion in oil, when it would in all probability have been such a work as all lovers of art could well be proud of having in the national collection.

In 1859, besides painting the replica of *Mary in the House of John*, already referred to, and a water-colour called *The Garden Bower*, Rossetti executed an important though small oil entitled *Bocca Baciata*, and the first study in chalk of what was to become ultimately one of the most beautiful of his pictures. The *Bocca Baciata* (the "kissed mouth") had its *motif* in some lines from a sonnet of Boccaccio, well known to Italian students, and was, as will be remembered by many, exhibited at the Hogarth Club some few years ago. The complexion of the fair damsel is painted with extreme care and delicacy, though the general effect was somewhat marred after its exhibition by being nominally touched up by the painter; for few artists have the faculty of successfully re-manipulating their pictures, and it is well known amongst his friends that Rossetti seldom if ever improved anything by long

subsequent alteration or "smoothing." In this instance it is simply an alteration in the flesh tints on the nose, sufficient, however, to attract attention. The chalk study referred to, which is in the possession of Mr. William Graham, is that for *Beata Beatrix*, in the opinion of some perhaps the loveliest in subdued colour of all Rossetti's works; his wife in this year (1860) having not been long married, and the model for her who inspired the *Vita Nuova* and the *Divina Commedia*. It will be remembered that mention was made of a replica of the head of Christ in the *Mary Magdalene* drawing, and this, in common with the picture called *The Gate of Memory*, belongs to Mr. Moncure D. Conway. In this "Head" the eyes are especially fine and clear, and altogether the face is that of a poet of the people, his brow and eyes freighted with refined power; as for the composition, it would seem to be partly in water-colour partly in oil, the latter perhaps predominating.

In 1860 Rossetti was in Paris, and it was shortly before going thither that he made the fine finished water-colour study of the triptych that was painted in oil the following year and placed in Llandaff Cathedral, and which original design is now in the possession of Mr. Vernon Lushington. There will be no necessity, however, to describe it separately from the later work. Also at this time, or perhaps in 1859, Robert Browning sat for his portrait at the special request of the artist, the drawing (which was finished in Paris) being in water-colour, and highly interesting; and also to this period belongs an interesting though much slighter sketch of Mr. Tennyson. The latter is owned and much valued by Mr. Browning, who tells me that Tennyson was reading his new poem *Maud*

one evening, and that Rossetti, who with himself, Mrs. E. B. Browning, and others, was present, made a rapid but very graphic pen-and-ink sketch of the Laureate from an unobserved corner of vantage.<sup>1</sup> No wonder that the owner of this drawing duly values an authentic portrait of Alfred Tennyson while reading such a poem as *Maud*, when such was made by a fellow-poet as well as artist like the author of *The House of Life*.

It was while staying in Paris that he also completed the fine composition already described under the title *How They Met Themselves*, and in addition to this a most interesting and uncharacteristic drawing called *Dr. Johnson and the Methodist Ladies at the Mitre*. This design is also one of those highly-finished ink drawings that he so excelled in executing, and alien as the subject seems to be to his special powers it is yet remarkably successful, a true Hogarthian spirit seeming to have influenced its composition, the characterisation of the Doctor and the ladies being admirable, and the surroundings carefully studied. It is a small drawing, certainly not more than about ten inches by eight, and is still in the possession of its original owner, Mr. Boyce; and it is, if I am not mistaken, the only design or picture by Rossetti that has the place of its painting inscribed on the face in addition to the signature and date. A replica was subsequently made of it nearly or quite double in size, but I have been unable to ascertain whether in colour or not,<sup>2</sup> though I should think it most probably the former; the only

<sup>1</sup> I should have antedated this sketch by four or five years. For exact particulars *vide* footnote to page 19, Chapter I.

<sup>2</sup> Since writing this I have learned that the replica is a highly-finished drawing in water-colours.

record I have being that of its disposal at the sale after Mr. Plint's death, already referred to, where it was purchased for about £76. Mr. Boyce has also a small pencil portrait-drawing belonging to this year, beautifully finished; this was executed at Upton, and is, I believe, a very good likeness of one whose face became the artist's ideal type in female portraiture. About this time was executed a fine portrait of Mr. Swinburne, and it was also about the autumn of 1860 that Rossetti commenced an important work which was finished about the end of the following year, viz. a triptych for Llandaff Cathedral. I have heard this spoken of as a typical example of the higher Preraphaelite manner, but the confusion of ideas prevalent as to what is Preraphaelitism is here again wrong or partly wrong; indeed, nothing can be more misleading than to call Rossetti a Preraphaelite in any other sense of the term than that of a Protestor; and in this triptych he is only "Preraphaelite" in so far that his treatment of sacred subjects is not conventional, as for instance in the omission of nimbi round the angels' heads, trusting rather to impressive colour-tones and solemnity of treatment for the effect older painters were wont to obtain by well-understood symbols; but he is far from acting up to the central Preraphaelite idea of absolute natural and historic truth, or truth as approximate as possible, when, for instance, he paints King David, in the right wing, as in the costume and coat of mail of a mediæval knight, and seated on a throne with brazen peacock-feather designs. Here he is represented as playing a harp, music fitting for one of those triumphant psalms after victory that have echoed ever since in the hearts of all nations fighting in a righteous cause. In the left

wing the young poet-shepherd of Israel is seen preparing for his combat with Goliath, but the figure of the latter is not seen in the painting. In the central portion, pre-eminently remarkable for rich but subdued colours, there is represented the manger of the Nativity; with the Virgin and Child receiving the worshipful recognition, not of the conventional shepherds and wise men of the East, but simply of one shepherd, typifying the humble estates of life, and one king, typical of the great and powerful upon earth. The latter lays his crown and the former his staff before the young Christ, and betwixt them a kneeling angel holds a hand of either; while around the manger stand, watchful of the Divine Child, a circle of angels, and above, in the arch made by the frame, two others with musical instruments. There are few who have seen this fine composition who have not been impressed by its dignity and solemnity, its rich depth of colour, and the charm of its general effect.

Amongst the *Sonnets for Pictures* in the first series of Rossetti's poems will be remembered two on a drawing called *Cassandra*, a design that the artist attached great importance to himself, and which he composed during 1861. His own descriptive footnote to these sonnets gives a brief outline of the drawing: "The subject shows Cassandra prophesying among her kindred, as Hector leaves them for his last battle. They are on the platform of a fortress, from which the Trojan troops are marching out. Helen is arming Paris; Priam soothes Hecuba; and Andromache holds the child to her bosom." This drawing is a fine piece of composition, and visibly contains the possibilities of as great an historical picture as has been painted



for many a year, and though the foreshortening is sometimes unsuccessful the figures of Hector and the beckoning soldiers are impressive in their fittingness. On the other hand, Helen is hardly such an one as her whose beauty "launched a thousand ships, and burned the topless towers of Ilium," resembling more some spiteful Goneril or Regan with a certain cruel witchery and fascination about her serpentine presence. Paris is not so much a soldier as a courtier of mediæval France, one part vanity, one part braggadoccio, and two parts licentious to the very heart's core. Helen, sitting upon the couch where he is lying and fastening on his lower armour, is clothed in a white robe, clasped at the shoulder by the symbolic scallop shell; and on Paris himself, as he toys with her flowing hair and seems to mock Hector's earnestness, there are two significant ornaments—one, a large gold or silver brooch with a figure of Venus in the act of throwing the apple of discord, and an armlet of a silver torch and gold flame, symbolical of what their love was to ancient Greece and the "Trojan land:"—

"O Paris, Paris! O thou burning brand,  
Thou beacon of the sea whence Venus rose,  
Lighting thy race to shipwreck." . . .

In the same year were painted *Fair Rosamond* and *The Farmer's Daughter*, the first of which was an oil, and both of which were sent the following year to the Royal Scottish Academy by the artist himself from his studio in Chatham Place, Blackfriars, where they were Nos. 796 and 729 respectively, and where neither were sold and seemed to have attracted little or no public notice. As already mentioned, the drawing called *The Farmer's Daughter* was an early water-

colour, differing in minor details from the large and important painting called *Found*, upon which for so long a period Rossetti was engaged, and which, after all, he did not live to complete. A celebrated artist who saw *Fair Rosamond* at the time of its exhibition has spoken to me of it as one of the finest productions of Rossetti's early period, and a picture that he can recall in all its beauty despite the lapse of twenty years. He has described it to me as a "life-size oil picture, of very splendid colour and rich impasto. Rosamond is represented leaning from a window surrounded with roses, holding in one hand—the other being pressed against her bosom—the tightening red silk cord which guided the king to her bower, and indicated his approach."

Mr. Boyce, who has so much of the early interesting work of Rossetti, has a pencil drawing which the latter took of Mrs. Wells the day after her death, dated 15th July 1861, perhaps the most exquisite piece of pencilling the artist ever accomplished. At a first glance it may seem somewhat slight, but there is not a single stroke lost, while not a single stroke could be missed, and the delicacy and refinement of the drawing deserves all praise. There are two interesting water-colours, *Lucrezia Borgia* and *Leah and Rachel*, painted in this year; the first is not a replica of the *Borgia* already referred to in the possession of Mr. Boyce, but a different subject belonging to Mr. Rae. Lucrezia is clad in a white dress with gold embroidery, and is washing her hands in a curious basin, after preparing a poison-draught for the figures approaching; the general effect, however, is that of a composition somewhat crudely painted, in great part the result of a "retouching"

which was not an improvement, subsequent to its exhibition at the Hogarth Club. The *Leah and Rachel* is a very interesting drawing. In the foreground is a well-spring at either side of which stand the sisters, Rachel dressed in purple with a gray-green veil about her, and a golden band round her waist and falling down her robe, and Leah in a uniform green; while beyond is the figure of Jacob walking meditatively towards them, the background being composed of green grassy sward and light green woodland, with the young trees wide apart; such trees and greenery, it may be remarked, as no ancient Israelite ever beheld in his native land. Mr. Heaton has in his possession a drawing entitled *Regina Cordium*, signed *Woodbank*, Nov. 1861, wherein a lady sits looking at a heart-shaped pansy; the picture being in reality a portrait of Mrs. Heaton as seen through the medium of Rossetti's not always improving or even "resembling" crayon or brush. Early in the same year was finished the fine head in oil called *Bard-Alane*, which was originally in the possession of Mr. Plint, and now belongs to Mr. Leathart; and contemporaneously the artist executed the small oil portrait of his wife, which, till lately, was in the possession of Mr. Ruskin.

I am not absolutely certain, but I think the first of the *Penelopes* was drawn in this year.<sup>1</sup> It is a large cartoon executed in red and black crayons, and is amongst the first, if not *the* first, of that impressive series of what may be called classical re-creations that raises Rossetti's work in this sphere to the extreme heights of imaginative achievement. Yet his "classical"

<sup>1</sup> If the fine chalk belonging to Mr. Leathart be the original, then I have antedated it by seven years.

work can be so called only in a restricted sense, first and most importantly because his sympathies were *not* Greek but Gothic, and because his creations typify the mysterious yearning of life, the brooding and hope and despair and resignation of a certain type of womanhood, not the joy *in* life, the exultation of physical being, the spiritually untroubled Greek ideal. Penelope, Pandora, Proserpina, these as they appeal to us through the medium of Rossetti's subtle and beautiful art are not the Penelope and Pandora sung of and painted from time immemorial, the Proserpina who wandered in fair girlhood in the bright sunshine along the warm sweet-scented Sicilian fields: but through the eyes of *this* Penelope all womanhood that dreams and yearns for a scarcely definite yet apprehended ideal love seems to look forth; in the eyes of *this* Pandora lie prophetic gleams of all she, typical of women, can let loose upon the world, as she opens the casket from whence wing in circling and evasive flight passions and delights and joys and sorrows; and on the face of *this* Proserpina, queen of the dark realms, as she passes along a corridor in her splendid but desolate palace, there broods the regret and the passionate longing of all women who look into the past and see that it is full of light, and that its day can never dawn again.

This period of his art-career, wherein his highest imaginative and technical work was accomplished and his inspiration came to him direct from his own poetic dreams and visions, or from the sympathetic pages of the *Vita Nuova* and *Il Paradiso*, may be roughly stated as being from 1866 to 1876, such a ten years of imaginative and consummate work as may be doubted

ever to have been excelled or even equalled by any English artist save Turner.

Also in 1861 or possibly early in 1862, Rossetti executed some important work for the fine church of St. Martin's in Scarborough, consisting of two designs for windows and a panel painting in two partitions. A better impression, indeed, would be obtained from these cartoons than from the windows themselves, partly because the rough "leading" of the windows breaks up the designs, giving a somewhat coarse look to the work; and partly because the windows are high in the west wall of the church, so that they cannot be seen to advantage. The subjects are respectively, *Adam in Paradise before the Fall* and *Eve in Paradise before the Fall*; the figures in both instances being life-size, and the treatment throughout each cartoon being very similar. Under a tree with rich green foliage, Adam, with his left arm thrown over one of its lower boughs, stands in an easy and finely-poised attitude, and with his right foot tickles a bear which is lying on its back, while his face beams with laughter at the antics of the brown clumsy animal; and from the tree looks down upon him, as if sharing his amusement, a brown squirrel, while around him are other animals, not fearing or inimical but companions. The figure is nude but draped with masses of foliage; and a strict harmony of colour is maintained between the rich browns of the bear and squirrel, the varying green of the trees and foliage, the light golden hair and the flesh tints of Adam, the yellow sunflower, etc.; the same being observed in the *Eve* picture, where also one or two red flowers give a deeper contrast. Eve is represented fondling a dove; an owl looks at her from a tree, and other birds are about

her ; near at hand also is a dappled deer or fawn, not unlike the one in the *Mary Magdalene* drawing, the fair face of the mother of man being almost as beautiful as the central figure of that design.

More characteristic than these is the double-panel painting in the pulpit of St. Martin's, in the ornamentation of which Mr. Ford Madox Brown and others were coadjutors. Rossetti's two panels are on the subject of the *Annunciation*, and are painted by himself and not simply after his designs. They are placed one above the other, and in the lower the Virgin, clad in a white dress almost hidden by a blue cloak, is sitting as if rapt in meditation ; and on her knee lies the open book of the Scriptural prophecies which she has been reading. Apart from the expression of the face there is a wonderful expressiveness in the attitude of submission in the stretched open hands, and it would be evident even if not pictorially made manifest, that she has heard and accepted meekly the angelic revelation : the two panels being made one by the trellis-work, composed in part of red and white roses and lilies, extending from the background of the lower. From the upper panel the *Annunciation* angel is looking down, ornamented with brilliant peacock wings.

About six years later (1867) Rossetti executed his last composition of this class—the design for the memorial window to his aunt, Miss Maria Margaret Polidori, now in Christ Church, Albany Street ; the second, I think, on the right-hand side after entering. It is in three small divisions, each a square surrounded by small square panes of white glass, with each a conventional rose in sepia thereon : in the central division Christ (the subject being *The Sermon on the Mount*),

clothed in a red robe and standing on the green grass, is teaching, while grouped beside him are male and female figures, amongst the latter one evidently being St. Peter. In the right division is represented an angel in the sky, leading a crowd of halt and maim to the Saviour, and in the left there is a similar angel guiding another number of hale young men and women, some with infants, to the central figure: the colouring throughout being rich and harmonious, and the drawing good.

In 1862 Rossetti completed the two designs for his sister's *Goblin Market, and other Poems*, which have been already described; the original sketches and drawings of these, as well as those of 1866, belong to Mr. Charles A. Howell; another interesting sketch at this time being the fine pencil portrait of his friend of long standing, Miss Alice Boyd of Penkill Castle, in Ayrshire, where it will be remembered he spent part of the autumns of 1868 and 1869. In addition to the important *Paolo and Francesca* drawing, and a portrait in oil of Mrs. Leathart, he also painted in this year four or five water-colours, and one small oil. The most interesting of these is the *Princess Sabra*, for its interest depends not alone upon its subject and execution, but also on the fact that it was the last thing he ever painted, with his wife as a living model; her final sitting to him for the purpose taking place but a few days before her death. It is the same drawing as sometimes referred to under the title of *St. George and the Dragon*, and exemplifies one of those legendary tales which Rossetti so delighted in. The far-famed knight and the Princess Sabra are in a room looking out into a thronged square where lusty heralds are trumpeting forth their messages to the attentive crowds, from whose midst is

reared a huge platform on which is borne the vast and hideous bulk of the slain dragon. The hero himself is unhelmeted but otherwise fresh from his deadly encounter, and he stands with eyes still watchful of the whilome curse of the land as he washes his blood-stained hands. His face is of a fine manly type, and is none the less thoroughly human because of the nimbus around it wherein is written "St. George." Kneeling before him, the Princess holds for him his long steel-crested and heavy helmet, in whose capacious hollow the water is contained with which he bathes away the bloody stains of the conflict, kissing his hands awhile as she looks with pathetic and loving eyes upon his somewhat weary and anxious face. She is crowned, and over her rich green robe the heavy luxuriant hair sweeps to the floor. The composition is altogether a fine one, though decidedly more fitting for its water-colour stage than for replication in a large oil painting, which the artist indeed never attempted, though some years later (in 1868) he completed a somewhat enlarged and altered water-colour replica, if the word may be thus used, which is now in the possession of Mr. Frederick Craven; and it is this latter, and not the original belonging to Miss Heaton, that was exhibited during the past summer in the Loan Exhibition at the Royal Institution of Manchester.

As the *Princess Sabra* was the last thing he painted before his wife's death, so a small but richly-toned water-colour, known simply as *Girl at a Lattice*, was the first he executed thereafter. It was while staying with Mr. Madox Brown that he was attracted one day by the healthy face of a sunburnt country girl looking out of a window with a framework of green leaves, so



that he once more took up the brush and wrought this healthy and pleasant little picture. Early in this chapter the design for the Tennyson quarto called *Mariana* was described, and there is not much more to be said for Mr. Rae's beautiful little water-colour replica of the same, done in 1862, except that it is much the more effective of the two: indeed it is perhaps the most beautifully toned of all the early water-colours, and one that the artist set great store by himself. The same gentleman has also an interesting head in oil belonging to this year. *Bethlehem Gate* is remarkable for some very fine colouring and some very ineffective drawing. It is in water-colour, and is full of a subdued light, replete with indefinite charm as the "gloom and glory" of a windowed cathedral aisle. The Virgin, dressed in a dark-brown robe with over it a long dark-blue mantle, escapes from the scene of the massacre with her child in her arms, with Joseph following beside her with clasped hands and anxious face, while in front flies the dove, conspicuous in its aureole. Mary is led by an angel, clad in green and with scarlet wings, while a similar angel, of whom only the head and one arm are seen, guards the refugees behind, beyond whom again is the Gateway thronged with a confused medley of soldiers, swords, and murdered children. Beyond the walls a dark neighbouring hill rises sheer up, and above it a troubled darkness where the night is passing away and overhead the rose and yellow prelude the dawn; Nature here becoming the glass wherein the future of humanity is mirrored. The drawback to this otherwise fine and impressive picture is the painfully drawn child, who looks more like some fat Esqui-

maux baby than an Eastern Jewish, much less an ideal infant.

In addition to these drawings and designs, it was in 1862 also that Rossetti painted one of his masterpieces in colour, the comparatively speaking well-known *Paolo and Francesca*. The original is still in the possession of Mr. Leathart, and a replica differing considerably in colour and never retouched belongs to Mr. George Rae, while the first pencil study is, or was, owned by Mr. Ruskin. It is in three compartments, the central of which represents Dante and his guide Virgil passing in hell the lovers whom the former has immortalised; and as the Florentine gazes with pitying eyes he draws up almost to his mouth his robe, as though shrinking from so pitiable a sight, while over his and Virgil's head, in the upper part of the design, is the simple exclamation "O Lasso!" In the left compartment the lovers are seen in a close embrace, but blown like leaves before a gale, and as they drift past in an air filled with red flames like fiery hearts they turn their woe-begone faces to him who thus sorrows for their fate, faces white with the anguish that is not of a day or a year, but of all days and all years for ever; but still they cling to one another, their very garments seeming as one, and neither the fiery rain of those desolate and cruel regions nor memory of the past nor hope for the future can make one separate from the other. They are as one love, passing through flames of division but indivisible. In the right compartment is represented the scene whose fateful termination was so sad, for here Paolo and Francesca come upon the passage wherein a love-chord awaits their touching,—the line is read, the volume

(*Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse!*) is allowed to fall from their hands, the look is given which can never be recalled or forgotten, the long passionate kiss that can never be cancelled lives on the lips of both, and close at hand is the unseen treacherous dagger that shall enable them to love each other for ever, but in hell. Not only is the colour throughout this triform design in thorough harmony, and the whole technique such as any artist might be glad to include amongst the productions of his best period, but the insight also, the sympathetic depth and earnestness of treatment, the artistic *fervour* throughout are in a high degree remarkable. It is greatly to be wished and hoped that such work as this should be well exhibited, and if possible secured for institutions or museums where art students pursue their studies; the example of such compositions, in every sense harmonious, colour, drawing, finish, *motif*, and artistic insight, could not fail to be seed that would produce probably a limited but certainly a rich harvest.

When referring to compositions by Rossetti of 1849 and 1850 I mentioned Mr. Rae's having the first study in ink of the picture called *Dante and Beatrice*. This composition is in oil, and was commenced and perhaps finished about 1859, and though it is not so full of sustained power or so impressive as the *Paolo and Francesca* triptych, it is yet an important composition. It is in two compartments, the left of which has been twice, and perhaps oftener, reproduced as a small water-colour, while the right is familiar in subject though not in detail to those acquainted with one of the later and finest Dante pictures. The latter represents a street or piazza in Florence with Beatrice

descending as Dante himself ascends the stone steps, and she is giving him that salutation which, he himself has told us, made him as though about to faint ; while in the right compartment the scene is in paradise with Beatrice, accompanied by two others, meeting her laurelled lover, and gazing at him with an intense spiritual longing, while his face seems too solemn for joy, too full of patient reverence for aught save silent expectation. This portion was described, under the title "Guardami ben : ben son, ben son Beatrice," as belonging to the year 1852, and mention was also made of a more finished and softer-coloured replica painted in 1864 belonging to Mr. Graham.

By the summer of 1863 Rossetti had painted one of the most beautiful of his pictures, the lovely *Beata Beatrix*, now in the possession of Lord Mount-Temple. He stated once that no picture ever cost him so much pain in painting, and at the same time he was conscious of never having been more master of his art ; and the first of these expressions will be understood when it is explained that Beatrice is a direct portrait of his wife, and the first time her face had been painted by him since her death ; the portraiture being partly from memory, partly from various earlier drawings, and partly from the chalk study for the picture already referred to. The *Beata Beatrix* is frequently spoken of and referred to as *The Dying Beatrice*, and even as *The Dead Beatrice*, but both titles are misnomers, she being only in a trance symbolical of death ; but the following letter from the artist himself will at once settle the question of title and adequately explain the subject :—

"The picture (*Beata Beatrix*) illustrates the *Vita Nuova*, embodying symbolically the death of Beatrice as treated in that

work. The picture is not intended at all to represent death, but to render it under the semblance of a trance, in which Beatrice, seated at a balcony overlooking the city, is suddenly rapt from earth to heaven.

"You will remember how Dante dwells on the desolation of the city in connection with the incident of her death, and for this reason I have introduced it as my background, and made the figures of Dante and Love passing through the street, and gazing ominously on one another, conscious of the event ; while the bird, a messenger of death, drops the poppy between the hands of Beatrice. She, through her shut lids, is conscious of a new world, as expressed in the last words of the *Vita Nuova*—*Quella beata Beatrice che gloriosamente mira nella fascia die colui qui est per omnia sæcula benedictus.*"<sup>1</sup>

The figure of Beatrice is life-size and about two-thirds is represented on the canvas, where she sits with lovely rapt face and clasped hands, and closed eyes, as if inly gazing upon quiescent death, or upon approaching sleep leading with him some rare unearthly and too beautiful dream : in reality, she is in the trance spoken of in the foregoing letter, and in the spirit has already entered upon the new life. About her auburn hair an indescribably soft radiance of light plays, not definite enough to be called an aureole and yet almost such ; and a crimson bird with outspread wings, a dove heavenly coloured, poises in downward flight just above her knee, bearing to her a large white poppy emblematical of the sleep of death. She is clothed in a soft green bodice exquisitely harmonising with the faint purple of her sleeves and paler dress. Behind, in the right of the picture, is a figure, also softly aureoled, clothed in crimson or flame-colour, this being Love ; beside whom is Dante in a stooping posture, as though

<sup>1</sup> " *That blessed Beatrice who now gazeth continually on His countenance 'who is blessed throughout all ages.'*"

bending forward in eager contemplation ; while in front of Beatrice is a dial, whereon the sun-guided shadow registers the hour wherein ere long she shall be called to "be glorious under the banner of the blessed Queen Mary," the day of June 1290 having the mystic, and in Dante's mind sympathetic, number nine. The exquisite harmony and softness, grace and loveliness, of this painting entitle it to rank amongst the artist's masterpieces, and to take a high place amongst the great works of art by which England has been enriched during the last hundred years. If all else by Dante Rossetti were to perish, and two such works, say, as the *Dante's Dream*, now at Liverpool, and the *Beata Beatrix* were alone to reward the search of some great art-critic of the future, there can be little doubt but that these would be sufficient in themselves to establish a great reputation, a reputation second, perhaps, to no English artist of the poetic school—such as would be the case with Michelangelo or with Raffaele if nothing but the Sibyls of the Sistine survived or if the Madonna di San Sisto was all of the Urbinate's that remained to us.

In this instance, as in many others, the frame itself was designed by the artist, and adds greatly to the general effect. On the underside, in addition to the date 9th June 1290, it has the words *Quomodo sedet sola civitas*, the first words of that lamentation from Jeremiah which Dante used when after the death of Beatrice "the whole city came to be as it were widowed and despoiled of all dignity:" *Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo! facta est quasi vidua domina gentium!* "*How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow, she that was great among the nations!*"

More than once Rossetti had been asked to paint a replica of this picture, but for long he invariably refused, those intimate with him knowing that it was because of the painful memories it recalled, the idea that when he was painting Beatrice in her death-like trance he was also painting again his dead wife ; but some nine years after this date he voluntarily offered to paint for his friend Mr. Graham the long-desired replica, the latter having done Rossetti a considerable service which he thought it fitting to thus acknowledge and repay. This duplicated picture bears date 1872, and differs from Lord Mount-Temple's in having a predella, the subject of which is the meeting of Dante and Beatrice in paradise, with damsels playing lutes and citherns, and behind Beatrice herself eight crimson birds hovering in soft winged flight. On the lower part of the frame are the words and date—

Mort : Die 31. Anno 1300.

Veni, Sponsa, De Libano.

A fine composition certainly, but not equalling the original, lacking its depth and glow and soft chastened light, and showing traces of laborious working out not to be found in the earlier picture. It is, nevertheless, a fine and noble painting, only inferior to the artist's highest when seen immediately after the picture of 1863.

About midway in the same year a small oil painting called *Aurelia* was finished, which, painted from the same model, might pass as an indefinite prelude to *Lilith*, begun a year or so later, probably late in 1864 or early in 1865. That is, as it now appears, for *Aurelia* was almost repainted and greatly improved in 1873; originally, no resemblance of the kind mentioned

would have been observable, the picture then being an oil replica of the *Fazio's Mistress* drawing already described. It was at the date of repainting and alteration that Rossetti changed its title to *Aurelia*, on what ground I am not at present aware. It is one of the extremely limited instances wherein he improved a picture by alteration.

A careful replica of the *Lucrezia Borgia* drawing of 1851 is dated 1863, and was one of the exhibited pictures in the Manchester Royal Institution Exhibition: and Mr. S. Wreford-Paddow has a highly-finished *Head of a Girl* in pencil on Whatman paper, about three-quarter small Venetian life-size; this drawing being the first executed for *The Blue Bower*, begun or finished the following year. It is complete, however, in itself, and is one of the most successful drawings from a well-known model of the artist's,—not a friend but a model. Late in the autumn was drawn the first study for the splendid *Venus Verticordia*, which, though altered and in some ways greatly improved in the water-colour and oil pictures, is in the chalk one of the finest crayon compositions the artist ever achieved, the combined delicacy and strength, light and depth, being little short of marvellous. In this drawing Venus leans upon a bar, or perhaps the upper part of a balustrade, and looks straight forward with significant eyes; and while the apple and the dart are here, neither the butterflies nor the foliage that add such charm to the complete work are introduced. The face differs also, not so much in feature as in significance; and while it lacks a certain spirituality manifest in the painting, it more resembles the ideal *Venus Verticordia*, being of a more fleshly type.



Also at this time, by-the-bye, a replica was made of the *St. George and the Dragon* drawing, some pages back described under its usual title *Princess Sabra*.

The years 1864-5 were the last in which Rossetti painted from choice much in water-colour, after this date most of his large pictures being commissioned before painting or when half finished, and so leaving him little leisure for minor work.

### CHAPTER III.—*Continued.*

#### DESIGNS FOR PICTURES: CRAYONS: PAINTINGS.

IN 1864 three important oils were finished or partly completed, but I will mention the water-colours first. Chief amongst these is the large and fine picture belonging to Miss Heaton, called *Joan D'Arc*, a picture that has subsequently been painted twice and perhaps thrice, and, in at least the last instance, in oil. The saviour of France is clothed in armour of which only the mailed arms are visible, over it being a mantle worked in gold, with large lily-like flowers, red-hearted and outlined, patterned thereon. Her powerful and strongly marked face, with the visionary gray eyes, is thrown back, and the dark-brown wavy hair sweeps down over her shoulders; while with firm masculine hands she clasps the heavy hilt of the backward-slanted sword, kissing it as she vows her vow of deliverance. Behind, signifying France I presume, are four tall white lilies which stand out in pleasant relief against the dark hair and the metallic sheen of the sword and armour. It is a picture much admired by all who have seen it, and though not perhaps so characteristic of Rossetti it is one he thought well of himself, and which he was less unwilling to duplicate than was generally the case, despite the many replicas he painted in all. Another drawing of this date was the

small water-colour already referred to as having been exhibited in Glasgow in 1879, entitled *Spring*, and representing a girl cutting blossoms from a tree; and also at this period was finished the replica in colour of the strange design called *How They Met Themselves*, already described; as also the water-colour *Guardamibén*, etc., mentioned under date 1852 as forming portion of the *Dante and Beatrice* picture. Two other water-colours and one pencil sketch make up the drawings of which I have record, executed in this year, the latter being a portrait of Miss Heaton (London); one of the former being another *Hamlet* subject. It is entitled *The First Madness of Ophelia*, and the representation is that of Horatio leading Ophelia away, while the king and queen look on; Horatio is dressed in a red mantle over purple, and the unfortunate Ophelia in a dress of deep blue, with her hair crowned with flowers. The queen is dressed in green. This is an interesting drawing, but by no means equal to the "Hamlet and Ophelia" of 1855. The other of the two water-colours is accompanied by the lengthy title, *How Sir Galahad, Sir Bors, and Sir Percival were fed with the Sancgrael; but Sir Percival's sister died by the way*. On the right is painted the altar, and in front of it the Damsel of the Sancgrael giving the cup to Sir Galahad, who stoops forward to take it over the dead body of Sir Percival's sister who lies calm and rigid in her green robe and red mantle, and near whose feet grows from the ground an aureoled lily; while with his left hand the saintly knight leads forward his two companions, him who has lost his sister, and the good Sir Bors. Behind the white-robed damsel at the altar a

dove, bearing the sacred casket, poises on outspread pinions; and immediately beyond the fence enclosing the sacred space stands a row of nimbus'd angels clothed in white and with crossed scarlet or flame-coloured wings. Interesting as this drawing is, it almost seems discrepant at the same period when the artist was painting such pictures as *Lilith* (just begun) and *The Blue Bower* and even *The Loving Cup*, not so much because of subject but owing to the much cruder execution. Of the *Loving Cup* I have also seen a water-colour drawing, but whether it was the first study in colour for the oil or whether it was a small replica I cannot say for certain, though strongly inclined to consider the former the more probable.

The painting is not a large one, that is to say, not large compared to the generality of Rossetti's pictures. It is mainly composed of one figure, that of a fair healthy girlish lady, holding in her right hand the golden *Loving Cup*, and in her left its cover; while behind, against a background of diaper, is a row of bronze plates, beneath which some sprays of green tree ivy trail crosswise along the wall of the corridor or court in which she stands. Fixed behind her head, with its lovely soft brown hair, and twisted below her neck, falling thence adown her right shoulder, is a delicate green veil; round the white throat is a coral necklace of large square beads, with strings of silvery seed-pearls lower down over her dress; and from long sleeves of white lawn the fair arms and hands emerge, contrasting with the subdued gold of the carven cup. The deep blue eyes and the beautiful face are the crowning charm to a very charming picture, and one cannot help envying the fortunate cavalier for whom

the cup is ready and possibly some greeting that will fill his eyes with the same soft light that is in hers. A replica of this painting exists dated 1867, and is in the ownership of Mr. F. Leyland; indeed it is this replica I have just described, not having seen, so far as I can remember, the picture of 1864, though I understand Mr. Leyland's is the finer every way, and there is also a water-colour replica of this date in the collection of Mr. A. S. Stevenson of Tynemouth.

*The Blue Bower* is not only one of Rossetti's most fascinating pictures, but it is one of his masterpieces in technique, ranking in exquisite and harmonious colour effects with such consummate compositions as *La Bella Mano* or *Veronica Veronese*. Colour here becomes almost sweet sound such as the lady is listening to from the touched strings of her dulcimer, colours deep and lustrous and rich as any Venetian pigment ever used, and blended harmoniously, as blue foam-crested waves with green hearts blend and melt into each other. The name is a mere designation, signifying nothing beyond the fact of the scene represented, being a lady's bower with the walls inlaid with flawless blue tiles, the colour being perpetuated and intensified in the absolute blue of the cornflowers that lie in front of the black dulcimer she is playing, from which is pendent a crimson tassel, and in the turquoises in her hair and the depth of her lustrous eyes. In the centre of the picture is a table whereon beside the azure cornflowers a dulcimer is laid, and leaning thereover is a beautiful woman clad in a robe of superb sea-green, black bordered and lined with soft white fur, this latter falling in thick folds over her bosom but leaving the full throat bare in its own beauty, while falling

over the side of her face and adown her shoulders are great masses of luxuriant golden brown hair, portions of the latter being kept back from the listening and charmed ear by a golden pin where a deep carbuncle or ruby is encircled by turquoises of such pale delicate blue as hills take on seen across water on a summer day. With her right hand she touches chord after chord into sweet repeated and allied music, and she seems herself to vibrate and thrill with every note that rises circling through the blue bower or seems to swim dreamily just above the wild convolvulus whose large flowers mingle alongside of her with the trailing dark-green foliage of purple passion-flowers; for her lips are parted as though an accordant sound were about to issue therefrom, or as though the breath, held in for delight, were issuing softly, and her dreamy eyes are half closed as though the soul were lulled by some indefinite ecstasy. The lady of the bower has nothing of "conventual loveliness," she is sensuous with all the exquisite sensuousness of a creation by Titian or Giorgione; she is beautiful with the irresistible fascination of supreme bodily loveliness; entrancing as a Lilith with the dominant loveliness of Venus Verticordia, she has an additional charm, that of the inevitable refinement of music,—and though she were as lovingly cruel and remorseless as the Idalian and as wily as she whose beauty transcended Eve's, the fact of being in such absolute accordance with exquisite sound would enhance her with a Siren charm that would appeal to whomsoever looked upon her loveliness. She is sensuous but not sensual, a perfect physical woman yet not *merely* a woman; yet even if no soul animated the fair body she would be beautiful,

and therefore no more have been created in vain, whether on canvas by the artist or in life by nature, than the peacock who flashes his sunlit body amongst his fellows amid eastern forests, or the rose or lily that buds and blooms and passes away under English skies.

In the autumn of this year was commenced the large oil called *Lilith*, just referred to; but as it was not completely finished till early in 1868, it will be described under the latter date. Also early in 1865 was carried on in earnest what had been commissioned some few years previously, namely, a picture considered by some as one of his supreme works, the splendidly-coloured *The Belovèd*, or as it is sometimes called, *The Bride*; and in the same year was finished the first *Venus Verticordia*, commissioned some years previously and proceeded with to a great extent in Paris, but not finished till this date. It was again painted upon and greatly improved in 1873. The latter, though more interesting from being the original, is neither so large nor so fine in technique as the oil of 1868 belonging to Mr. Graham; and as, with the exception of a somewhat different type of face, the other differences are negative, it will be better to describe both together farther on.

The *motif* of *The Belovèd* is in some words from the *Song of Solomon*, "My beloved is mine, and I am his; let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; for thy love is better than wine;" and the picture represents a beautiful woman, with one of the loveliest, and at the same time unmannered, faces that Rossetti has painted. The prince or lord whom she is about to wed is unseen, indeed nothing is visible save the group around the bride, the figures in the foreground being

only little more than two-thirds painted; but the expressions tell their own tales, and where all the faces are such as would easily find bridegrooms, it is wonderful that the beauty of the "Belovéd" should so far transcend each. She is robed in a dress of grass-green, richly flowered in blue and red and gold, and with her white hands and raised arms she lifts with lingering grace a silky blue-green and white veil from her face, that its beauty may be made visible at last to the approaching bridegroom; while, in strong relief to the soft creamy whiteness of her skin, her head is crowned by two aigrettes composed of large pearls and brilliant scarlet corals and set so delicately that with every motion of the white neck and flower-like face, they tremble and vibrate like acacia sprays in a low wind. The four attendant ladies are diversely clad, but all so as to at once harmonise with and enhance the effect of the central figure, and in their expressions one may read with tolerable certainty how each regards the future lord of the bride whom they lead forth in all the pride and glory of her beauty: one of them on the right holding a large and scented japonica, and one on the left a bronze-yellow tiger-lily. Above them are the odorous blossoms and foliage of a spreading orange-tree, and in the foreground of the picture, serving as an admirable foil to the bride, is a swarthy and stalwart young negress, whose dusky skin shines with a bronze-hued lustre as the glow of the Eastern atmosphere lightens it up. She holds in her hands a gold vase full of pink and yellow roses, which are but intensified hues of the complexions of the bride and her hand-maidens, while on her swart breast lies a heavy gold ornament, set with rubies or



carbuncles, and round her head a golden band studded with blue turquoises. To many this picture will strongly appeal to whom Rossetti's more characteristic type of female face has not the attraction it has for others; and splendid, certainly, as are such faces as those of Beatrice, Proserpina, The Blessèd Damozel, and Astarte Syriaca, it must yet be confessed that though that of the Belovèd lacks their mystic significance and spiritual force, it is nevertheless more fascinating from a purely human point of view; and after all, when it is a bride that is in question, there is surely none who would hesitate between the central figure of this painting and such a queenlier but more unmortal love than Venus Astarte. It is not reflection, or regret, or sorrow, or nameless trouble, or the mingled pain and pleasure of indefinite yearning that is seen on any face here, but healthy nature, joy in the pride of life, happiness ever near, and anticipation ever beforehand. Rossetti fully recognised this himself, and I remember his telling me that, though he did not necessarily rank it the highest, he considered he had never surpassed it for downright loveliness; and though it is true he thought the type which is now so well-known and easily recognisable the most spiritually beautiful he was quite aware that departures therefrom, as in the "Belovèd" and the forceful and impressive *Sibylla Palmifera*, were occasionally not only fitter, but every way finer under the circumstances. In a sense, indeed, he became almost a slave to one type; but his invariable defence of this was that it was to him an ideal face, or at any rate the highest in all qualities that appealed to him which he had ever seen, and that, therefore, not being a portrait painter, he could

not do better than accept it as his prevailing model. This is in great part true, but none the less there is a residuum of mistake which will be evident to any one seeing many of his pictures together; turning, for instance, from the *Astarte Syriaca* to the *Mnemosyne*, the impressiveness of whichever is last looked at must in great measure be lost upon the spectator, when an almost identic face and neck and thick-clustering hair are visible; while either seen separately would be strongly impressive.

Besides some chalk studies and some four or five water-colours, there was also painted in 1865 a small but most beautiful oil called *Il Ramoscello*, which is a half-length and less than half life-size figure of just such another lady as her of the *Loving Cup* or the *Christmas Carol*, only more lovely than either, the delicate bloom on her face being peach-like in its softness and rarity. She is dressed in a kind of slate-green, holding in her hand an acorn branch; her brown hair is such as we often see in England, and her blue eyes are not filled with strange dreams but with undefiled happiness in life for life's sake. Some time subsequently to its purchase Rossetti requested it again on loan for a short period, but the owner being in the studio one day perceived that the former was repainting it for some reason, greatly altering the type of face and the whole tone of the picture; fortunately he was able to get it away either at once or very shortly, and as soon as it was in his possession again he had the fresh and still wet material carefully removed, so successfully that the picture as it now hangs shows no signs of its temporary transformation. Of the five water-colours one is the *Hesperia Rosa* or *Elena's Song*, regarding which

some explanatory words of the artist have been already quoted when describing the original pen-and-ink design. In common with this drawing two others of the same date belong to Mr. F. Craven, one called *Aurora* and the other *Washing Hands*; concerning the *Washing Hands* the following notes by the artist will be of interest: "This drawing is called *Washing Hands*, and represents the last stage of an unlucky love affair. The lady has gone behind the screen (in the dining-room perhaps) to wash her hands; and the gentleman, her lover, has followed her there, and has still something to say, but she has made up her mind. We may suppose that others are present, and that this is his only chance of speaking. I mean it to represent that state of a courtship when both of the parties have come to view in reality that it will never do, but when the lady is generally, I think, the first to have the strength to act on such knowledge. It is all over, in my picture, and she is washing her hands of it." *The Merciless Lady* is an interesting water-colour, consisting in colour chiefly of strong blues and greens, and somewhat recalling *La Belle Dame sans Mercy* already spoken of; but the remaining water-colour of 1865 is a much finer one, painted in the same soft suffused undertones as *Bethlehem Gate* and *Francesca da Rimini*. It is styled *Fight for a Woman*, and the representation is that of a forest at twilight or early moonrise with two armed men in a life-and-death struggle, both evidently lovers of the lady standing near them with clasped hands and anxious face. The subdued colouring adds greatly to the effectiveness of the *motif* as well as being delightful to the eye in itself.

In 1866 Rossetti painted on commission the *Hamlet*

and *Ophelia*, one of his most beautiful water-colours and the original of which in ink has already been described under date 1855. Besides the additional interest of colour there are some material differences of arrangement, so much so that the two designs may be considered different versions of the same subject, but these differences I will not now specially point out, as they will be observable at once on comparison with the antecedent description. The Prince of Denmark and his betrothed are standing in a gallery, on the right Hamlet clothed in a black robe and with rich auburn hair, and on the left Ophelia in a dress of bluish-green with red sleeves, and with a veil covering the upper portion of the soft fair hair that suits the pathetic face. Before her is an ivory casket containing the things she is returning to Hamlet, and a bundle of letters wrapped round with green silk, while the Prince holds her right hand with both his own close to his lips, Ophelia's left hand resting on an open book. At the back is an opening through which trees are seen, and tapestry with dim figures and ships worked on it. Hamlet rests against a dark-green column with a red capital from which an arch springs, and there is a similar column on Ophelia's left side; the arch between the two columns being indicated by the curve of the stones immediately above the capitals. On the lower part of the frame the artist painted the words: *What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven?* The drawing is about 15 inches by 10 or 10½, and the colour is wonderfully rich and luminous, so much so that it is frequently taken by those who see it for the first time to be an oil painting. Contemporaneously, the two wood engrav-

ings for *The Prince's Progress* were finished, also one or two chalk drawings of heads, and in the latter part of the year (September) an exceedingly interesting crayon portrait of the artist's sister, Christina, sitting at a small reading-table, with book outspread before her, and leaning on her elbows with her chin supported on crossed hands. This drawing could easily be engraved, and would doubtless be welcome to many amongst the large number to whom the name of Christina Rossetti is amongst the best known of contemporary writers. To this year also belong two very fine oils, one being especially notable, viz. the *Sibylla Palmifera* and *Monna Vanna*. One or two pages back I spoke of the face of the bride in *The Belovèd* as one of the most beautiful he had painted, but that of *Monna Vanna* will probably be considered its superior by those who prefer the Rossettian ideal type (though by no means here too mannered, or even mannered at all in the fair sense of the term), and certainly as not far short by those opposed thereto. The *motif* of the picture might be defined "Beauty, as manifested in refined and exquisite feminine loveliness." The lady Vanna ("Monna" being but a contraction for "Madonna") sits looking right out from the canvas, dressed in a robe of white and gold with green rosettes, with, by her side, a large carefully-painted feather fan. Round her neck falls a long interlaced coral necklace and in her fair soft hair are pearl ornaments, while pendent over her bosom is a beautiful transparent crystal through which, like a waif of morning cloud, the soft cream-white skin can just be discerned; the green key, that is manifest throughout, being struck again in the large emerald or green-

stone in the ring of her right hand. The background is green, with a green glass vase containing flowers. Painted in 1866, it was purchased from the easel by the late Mr. William Blackmore, from whom, in 1869, it was repurchased by Mr. George Rae, and finally was again almost repainted by the artist in 1873; the latter considering it the best representation of his ideal of physical loveliness, as in *Sibylla Palmifera* he expressed his ideal of intellectual beauty. Indeed the name of the latter has a double significance, not only being his highest conception of beauty, but also being, in his own judgment, his finest work at the time of execution.<sup>1</sup> In his own words, "She bore the palm amongst all his other works."

*Sibylla Palmifera* is one of these splendid pictures one feels at once the artist has put *himself* into, as well as all his artistic powers. It is "that Lady Beauty, in whose praise" Rossetti's hand and voice were never tired, and his vision of her is thus—

"Under the arch of Life, where Love and Death,  
Terror and Mystery, guard her shrine, I saw  
Beauty enthroned."

The palm-bearing Sibyl sits in a kind of stone alcove forming the arch of Life, above her head on the right being a sculptured cupid, with blinded eyes and wreathed with a crown of fresh roses; on the left, a carven stone skull, wreathed also but with symbolical poppies, heavy and richly red. Her oval face, with

<sup>1</sup> Commissioned in 1864, the *Sibylla Palmifera* was mainly painted in 1866-7, though it did not leave the studio till 1870. As it is his finest representation of intellectual beauty, and the *Monna Vanna* of physical, so may the head of *Mary Magdalene* be said to be an ideal of spiritual loveliness.

its steadfast inlooking eyes, looks full from the picture, and her long soft brown hair is drawn back, leaving the clear forehead uncovered, but droops again with the grace of vine tendrils down over the right shoulder. She is clad in a deep lake-red robe, with white lawn undersleeves, and a dark green veil round the back of her head and below the neck, and trailing over the left shoulder, and in her right hand she holds the palm branch. Behind her is a round brazen vessel with incense burning, and two butterflies (one golden yellow and one reddish in hue) hovering above, and on her right stands a curious antique lamp palely flaming. But above any beauty of harmonious colouring, transcending any recognition of the thorough technique throughout, is the impression given from the expression of the Sibyl, so earnest, so concentrated, so superior to the ordinary half-doubting gaze of humanity.

“Hers are the eyes which, over and beneath,  
The sky and sea bend on thee,—which can draw,  
By sea or sky or woman, to one law,  
The allotted bondman of her palm and wreath.”

It is doubtful if anything more strictly *impressive* ever came from Rossetti's studio. The *Beata Beatrix* excels in exquisite softness of subdued colour, the *Blue Bower* lacks in equal significance, the *Bride* is perhaps lovelier, *Astarte Syriaca* is more splendid, *The Blessèd Damozel* is more marvellous in its depth and richness, *Lilith* and *Venus Verticordia* more sensuously beautiful, but none transcends in impressiveness the *Sibylla Palmifera*, the *Proserpina* alone, perhaps, equalling it in this respect. The much-abused word “intense” is the fitting epithet to apply to the expression of the faces in these pictures. Besides a finished study in tinted

crayons, there is a fine rendering in black chalk of this noble design.

So early as 1867 Rossetti commenced the fine and pathetic *La Piu*, not gone on with, or rather not completed until 1881, and his friend, Mr. L. R. Valpy, possesses the fine first finished study in crayons belonging to this year or 1868; and also, in the same year, was begun Mr. Leyland's *Loving Cup*, already described. In addition to these were two small oils called *Joli Cœur* and *Monna Rosa*. The first is a most beautiful little work, equalling in exquisite delicacy of painting *Il Ramoscello*; and the latter represents a lady clad in a dress of pale emerald with golden fruit worked on it, standing and plucking a rose from a tree planted in a blue jar and fixed in a red earthen pot on a Japanese wooden flower-stand. Gold and red are the keynotes of this picture, and are perpetuated in various degrees in the twenty or more roses on the tree, in the gold working on her dress, the gold ornaments with which she is decked, the golden auburn hair, the red pot in the flower-stand, and the large peacock screen in the background, also of a red purple. Except as a study in colour, it has no special interest. Besides a small portrait of Mrs. Vernon Lushington, two water-colours were also painted at this time, one the finished study and one a replica of *Lady Lilith* and the other the important drawing entitled *The Return of Tibullus to Delia*, concerning which I have been informed on good authority that an oil replica exists.

The following year was a much more important one, comprising as it does not only two water-colours and some fine chalk drawings, but also *Lady Lilith*



and *Venus Verticordia*. Of the water-colours one is called *The Rose* and the other is the replica referred to when describing the *Princess Sabra* drawing of 1862. Amongst the chalks are *A Study* (Mr. Ellis's), *Lilith*, and *Reverie*, the first being a portrait in reddish crayons, seated, and full face, with some roses in a glass jar behind; the second, in a darker tone and with dark red-brown background, seems like a study for the figure of *Lilith*, in which case its date would be about the autumn of 1864, though it is, I understand, simply a chalk replica of *Lilith* herself without the other surroundings of the picture; and the third, *Reverie*, is a beautiful study for a picture, never carried out exactly, though finding allied expression in the *Day-Dream*, and belongs to Mr. Theodore Watts whose sonnet upon it is written on the frame. A woman, young and with a beautiful face, sits with her left arm on her knee and her face leaning on her left hand, around her the long cool sycamore leaves, which seem to be making a soft rustling as she dreams through the noontide, her face and eyes being transformed with the very spirit of reverie. Mr. Morris possesses a magnificent replica of this.

It will be remembered that in 1865 the first *Venus Verticordia* was painted, and that reference was made to a larger and more complete reduplication finished three years later. This great picture and *Lilith* are the two most sensuous paintings by Rossetti, the first in its direct and imperious appeal, the second in its subtler enticements. Yet with this it is not meant to say that in any sense of the word they are seductive beyond the just boundaries of art, that they are immoral because of unrefined representation. I am

aware that the pictures are disliked by some, but dislike may mean simply miscomprehension or wide divergence in sympathy; but how the dislike may mean objections on the score of morality I am wholly at a loss to understand, except that I suppose there are some people who would consider the nudity of Adam and Eve shameful even before the Fall, and who would look upon the sculptured purity of the Venus of Milo as mere exemplification of "harlotry" in stone. There must always be people of this kind, and possibly their antagonism may serve a good end. A marked instance of the general appreciation of high art is afforded by the way in which the magnificent and refined, though not *over-refined*, *Phryne at Eleusis*, by Sir Frederick Leighton, was looked at by visitors to last year's Academy,—a comparatively small section, recognising at once not only the hand of a master but one of the *chefs-d'œuvre* of a master, a picture replete with all the poetic insight and painter's craft that can make artwork memorable; a large number, perhaps the majority, chiefly passing it by with a kind of vague curiosity and subsequent indifference, or else hurrying on in case they should be observed contemplating its nakedness; and a third section either passing with a frown and averted eyes, or planting themselves firmly before it with righteous countenances, determined not to be abashed by any amount of "very objectionableness" even by a President.

The sonnet *Venus* by the artist, will be remembered by all who have read his poems, this sonnet being the same as painted on the base of the frame of the 1868 picture, the only difference between it and the printed copy being in the last line—

“And her far seas moan as a single shell,  
And through her dark grove strike the light of Troy,”

a rendering certainly not inferior, if not superior, to the later version.

The Venus of this picture is no Aphrodite, fresh and white and jubilant from the foam of Idalian seas, nor is she Love incarnate or human passion; but she is a queen of love who loves not herself, a desire that is unsatiable and remorseless, absolute, supreme, recking nothing of death or sorrow, hearing and seeing sobs and tears and supplications and after-curses, but heeding none thereof, conscious of sovereignty, yet knowing the vows and eternities of lovers to be as windblown vanities, and the end of all dust and ashes, yet affecting not herself. She is the Lust of the Flesh that perisheth not, though around her loves and lives and dreams are evermore becoming as nought.

She is represented as a large, almost massively made woman, and is nude to the waist, up to which she stands amid thick-clustering honeysuckles, while all around her are masses of roses with a luxuriance like that of creepers and orchids in a Brazilian forest. Her hair is of rich brown bordering upon dark auburn, and its heavy tresses fall down her white shoulders and past her full bosom; on her cheeks is the bloom of absolute health, her mouth is small and beautiful, and her eyes are of a penetrating hazel; while from out the hair itself there seems to radiate round the head an aureole of fringed yellow light with pale-gold or sulphur-coloured butterflies hovering in haunting dance before its radiance. Behind the myriad rose-blooms is the dark-green foliage of the mystic Venusian groves, and across this sombre background a strange bird of

brilliant blue-green plumage wings its sudden way. In her right hand Venus holds poised an arrow, curved and fluent, with a pale-yellow butterfly delicately clinging upon it midway, with wings erect and quivering, and in her left a ruddy apple with another sulphur-hued butterfly alit on its scented rind—"Alas! the apple for his lips, the dart that follows its brief sweetness to his heart"—the left hand with the apple being pressed against her right, while her full left breast blooms like another flower over the rich honeysuckles wherein she stands part shrouded. There is an exquisite continuous gradation and interlapse of hue between the silver-grays, the reddish-browns, and the dull yellows of the honeysuckles, the ruddy apple, the auburn tresses of Venus, her lips and eyes, the red and pink roses, the yellow butterflies, and the dark-green background. But, in common with the dozen or so great paintings by Rossetti, the dominant charm is due to the expression of the face; after the senses are gratified with colour and form, the critical eye with masterly workmanship, the spectator turns again to that which is rendered with such exceptional effect, the subtle and intensified expressiveness of the face. The original picture differs from Mr. Graham's in the face of Venus being more girlish and less sensuous, and, if less forcefully significant, more humanly beautiful; and in the soft light radiating from her hair there are no butterflies hovering, while there is but one poised upon the apple, pale sulphury yellow as before, and almost transparent. The face is the same as that of the chalk study specified some pages back.

While *Lady Lilith* is as sensuous as *Venus Verticordia*, it is in a different way, as differently almost as

a tigress is beautiful and a serpent is beautiful. The one dominates the souls of men, the other wiles them away. The Lilith legend is now fairly well known, viz. that before the creation of Eve Adam had a natural mate, as beautiful as the wife given him by God, but a pure animal though gifted with immortal womanliness; and this imperishable being now exists no longer as the Lilith of primal paradise but as a beautiful woman, luring to herself many souls in every generation of all the generations of men. This is the form of the legend which appealed so strongly to Rossetti from the first, and which he subsequently perpetuated both in verse and on canvas; but the commoner acceptance of it is that Lilith is no witch, mortal or immortal, but a poetic embodiment of the principle of evil inherent in man, the animal that is in such constant opposition to the mind, that has such wily enticements and enchantments for the body if it will but abjure the spirit.

It may with tolerable certainty be affirmed that nine out of ten painters prior to Rossetti would have represented Lilith as the legendary first wife of Adam *pur et simple*, and it shows the original and poetic bent of his genius that he should have pictured her seated in what might be a modern boudoir, and she herself as a beautiful woman of this or any time, not in the act of fascinating any son of Adam or preparing her subtle wiles, but simply as rapt in the contemplation of her own beauty, cognisant of her own voluptuous passions and those she can excite at will yet never carried away by her ardours, permeated with the spirit of insatiable desire yet alien to love, only wondering at and never quite fathoming the secret of her being and

the depths of her influence, a perfect physical woman but soulless as Lamia, yet animated by an immortal spirit—

"And still she sits, young while the earth is old,

And, subtly of herself contemplative,

Draws men to watch the bright net she can weave,

Till heart and body and life are in its hold.

The rose and poppy are her flowers ; for where

Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent

And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare ?"

Before seeing the picture I had long known it from description and from a photograph given me by the artist, and even on these somewhat scanty materials I was greatly impressed, and this impression was certainly not weakened but intensified when I at last saw the painting itself. Lilith is seated in a luxurious boudoir, clad only in a white underdress, leaving her bosom bare, and an ample chamber-robe of white fur, which is heaped in snowy folds around her, or, rather, on which she lies as if on a snowdrift above yielding mosses ; on her knee rests a pearl-flowered diadem strung on blue ribbon, and on her wrist is a scarlet coral bracelet. In her left hand she holds a small hand-mirror, pendent therefrom being a tassel of brilliant carmine, and in this glass she looks, "subtly of herself contemplative," regarding there her wealth of golden hair, the low forehead, the beautiful face with its half-closed eyes where passion sleeps scarcely stirring, and where calm self-scrutiny reigns, the lips curved amorously, the ivory neck rising from the large and voluptuous bosom, the white arms, and the hands whose caress is so cruelly fatal. At her left side is a dark-green glass jar with a large scarlet poppy in it, and on the oaken table or chest where stands an antique mirror lies a pink foxglove,

while clustering all around her are white roses with pink and red buds, the two dominant colours thus being red and white, the former carried from shade to shade in the coral bracelet, the carmine tassel, the golden hair, the scarlet poppy, the pink and red rose-buds, and the pink foxglove, the last with the rose and poppy being a flower associated with Lilith; while in the latter there is the soft whiteness of the fur robe, the delicate creaminess of the beautiful breast and neck and complexion, and the white roses growing in such profusion. In the large steel-clasped mirror standing on the oaken chest is reflected a pleasant glimpse of garden greenery, wherein the lights and shades on the brown trunks and green leaves suggest noontide and the coolness of forest spaces. Is this reflection of outer nature meant as a hint of that primal paradise where Adam and Lilith loved and bore

“Shapes that coiled in the woods and waters,  
Glittering sons and radiant daughters”?—

or is it intended to enforce by its suggestion of outer life the intense self-contemplation and true spiritual loneliness of this modern Lady Lilith—modern, yet the same as she who dallied with Adam before the creation of Eve, and who has ensnared ever since the souls of those made subject to her, as she will continue to ensnare till the end of time? She may be a principle of evil, she may be but the witch Lilith, immortal but only individual, or she may be well known to man under different names such as Cleopatra, or Lais, or Helen. Whatever she is and howsoever she may be known, she has in this painting had such pictorial representation as assuredly no artist ever designed before.

In 1869 I can find no record of any important work with the exception of the first chalk *Pandora*, indeed all else that I have been able to record under this date is comprised in a study in tinted crayons called *Rosa Triplex*, of which four or five years later a replica was made, and the first drawing in chalk of the fine picture known as *La Donna della Finestra*.<sup>1</sup> In the chalk study for this picture "the lady of the window" was portraitured from Miss Graham, the daughter of its owner, and the picture itself was completed ten years later, in 1879, when it will be described. The *Pandora*, one of Rossetti's finest creations, and several times replicated by him in oil and chalk, was first painted in oil about 1875 or 1876, and one of the finest sonnets amongst his *Sonnets for Pictures* is that headed *Pandora*. The large chalk drawing of 1869 is executed in a soft misty red, and though thus deprived of the additional charm belonging to the finished oil it is perhaps hardly less fascinating in its expressiveness, the subject being such as Rossetti seems pre-eminently suited for accomplishing with the utmost attainable success. The picture consists almost entirely of the figure of Pandora, who stands holding the mysterious casket, on which are the significant words *Ultima Manet Spes*, and from which issues a flame-winged brood of strange desires and passions of "ill-born things," "and good things turned to ill," while a strange mysterious trouble dwells upon the face of Pandora, and in her eyes, tender as those of Venus, there is the regretful gaze

<sup>1</sup> Since the above was written I have heard of several and seen two or three compositions belonging to this period. Especially notable is the beautiful portrait of Calliope Coronio (ætat xii.) and the noble Dante-portrait belonging to Mr. A. A. Ionides.



of Proserpine. Readers of Mr. Swinburne's enthusiastic essay upon *The Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, published in 1870, may recollect the following passage bearing upon both sonnet and design :—"Of the sonnets on the writer's own pictures and designs, I think that on Pandora to be the most perfect and exalted, as the design is amongst his mightiest in its godlike terror and imperial trouble of beauty, shadowed by the smoke and fiery vapour of winged and fleshless passions, crowding from the casket in spires of flamelit and curling cloud round her fatal face and mourning veil of hair." (*Essays and Studies*, p. 90.) As in *Sibylla Palmifera* and *Proserpina*, the artist's intense power of rendering expression, especially the expression of deep spiritual significance, is felt to dominate what else goes to constitute its beauty, that is to say, over and above mere *artistic* recognition of its merits there is the sense of realisation from expressive power strongly given.

Under this date I shall describe a very powerful design for a picture which, however, may quite well belong to an earlier but more probably to a later period, the description being entirely given from a very fine photograph in my possession, which, as the design was in pencil, is remarkably truthful in every respect. I refer to the drawing called *The Death of Lady Macbeth*, first sketched in a pen-and-ink study and afterwards highly finished in pencil, a design that if carried out would certainly have ranked high amongst Rossetti's historic conceptions, perhaps in its tragic significance and accomplished presentment have equalled the great design *Cassandra*. It will be remembered that the actual death of the guilty queen takes place during the fifth scene of the last act in Shakespeare's tragedy; but it

is not this event that is represented by Rossetti, but her *dying*, as say shadowed forth at the close of Scene II., where Macbeth makes his often-quoted question to the physician as to his power of ministering to a mind diseased, and vainly asking for "some sweet oblivious antidote" to cleanse the stuffed bosom of the perilous stuff which weighed upon the heart of his wife. The death, haunted by its dreadful memories and horrors, takes place in bed, as the play decidedly means us to infer despite Malcolm's remark on the rumour that her life was taken by "self and violent hands." The photographed pen-and-ink sketch I possess, though exceedingly forcible, almost terribly so, was so much improved on in the finished drawing that I need not specially describe it. In the pencil drawing Lady Macbeth is sitting up in the bed from which she is never to rise, and from her haggard shoulders has fallen the dishevelled nightdress; while with her left hand she rubs feverishly and incessantly the back of her right hand, on which she sees in fancy the blood spots of the murdered Duncan. A physician bathes her head with water from a basin held by a waiting-woman at the foot of the bed, and at her left one of the Court ladies has swooned from agitation and horror, holding in her drooping hands a large feathered fan with a long handle; at the foot of the bed also kneels a friar or priest, engaged in ardent prayer, behind whom stands a young novitiate holding a swinging incense-burner, from which issues curling smoke, and in the shadow of the heavy drawn-back curtains, on each of which is embroidered the crown of Scotland, is the old nurse watching eagerly the dying agony and remorse of Lady Macbeth. On a table behind the man of prayer is an antique oil-lamp with flame just about to expire,

symbolical of the passing life. In the open space left by the drawn-back curtains the court of Dunsinane Castle is seen with curious winding stairs reaching it from the turreted walls, and down these stairs a motley company passes, all catching sight of the mysterious gestures and death-scene of her whose ambition was not checked by the thanedoms of Glamis and Cawdor. The design throughout is finely conceived, the urgent face of the friar, that of the physician (not Shakespeare's "Doctor," however), and that of the eager old nurse, being especially noteworthy, though it must be confessed the face of Lady Macbeth more suggests madness than mere remorse and the superstitious terrors of guilt, while the upright female figure at the foot of the bed seems unnecessary, thereby weakening the forcefulness of the composition. The drawing as drawing is good, though again, as in the case of the *Hamlet and Ophelia*, fault must be found with the perspective of the stairways. There is nothing that specially points to the royalty of state in which the unfortunate woman dies, save the Scottish crown woven in the texture of the curtains and the carved crown headpieces of the bed-posts, the rest of the room being plain to a degree remarkable even in a Scottish castle of King Duncan's time. There is no date on either pen-and-ink sketch or the drawing, and in the latter only the title *The Death of Lady Macbeth*, written in the right lower corner; but in all probability the former was drawn about 1870, and the latter early in the seventies.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since this was written I have seen the original again, and have been assured that both were composed about 1874, and that the finished pencil design was antecedent to the rough pen-and-ink sketch.

While referring to compositions whose date is unknown to me, I may mention *Circe* and *Diana*, both in chalk; but in the case of each I am acquainted with no particulars save the fact of their existence. Somewhere in the sixties was painted the magnificent *Helen*, which it has never been my privilege to see, and which, therefore, I cannot describe further than by copying Mr. Swinburne's brief reference to it in his enthusiastic essay on the poetry of Rossetti, in his *Essays and Studies*:—"Helen, with Parian face and mouth of ardent blossom, a keen red flower-bud of fire, framed in broad gold of widespread locks, the sweet sharp smile of power set fast on her clear curved lips, and far behind her the dull flame of burning towers and light from reddened heaven on dark sails of lurid ships."

In 1870 was executed amongst some five or six other important chalk studies and portraits a fine chalk drawing called *Silence*, which was subsequently autotyped, and of which proof-copies can still, I understand, be procured at the Autotype Company's Exhibition Rooms in Oxford Street. With her right hand this figurative *Silentia* slightly raises the heavy curtain which may be considered significant of sleep, or of those places whereinto no sound ever breaks, and above her hangs upgathered a muffled bell. This drawing and a head entitled *Perlascura*, composed in 1878, are the only two pictures by Rossetti that have ever been in any public manner replicated. There is also a chalk drawing of *Silence*, without, however, being entitled to the name in anything save the similarity of face and figure, as there is no background of curtain or bell, belonging to 1870; and amongst one or two other minor crayons,

portraits, and others, a fine drawing called *La Donna della Fiamma*. It is wrought in delicate tints of reddish chalk, and is about half or two-thirds life-size; "la Donna" sitting with her face at a slight angle from the spectator, while from her outstretched hand sways upward a tongue of pure unburning flame, wherein is fashioned a small but mature spirit or figured dream, with clasped hands as though in supplication. It has not, as its name might possibly suggest, any connection with the painting of 1878 called *Fiammetta*, or *A Vision of Fiammetta*; but if it is, as I have been informed, the study for a more elaborate picture, I know nothing of the latter, and can find no corroboration of its having been even ever accomplished. Contemporaneously with *Silence* and *La Donna della Fiamma* there was finished an important design, in black and white, belonging to Mr. Theodore Watts, representing a girl reading a scroll, and illustrative of a story by Mr. Watts. In the same year as these drawings was painted the finest piece of portraiture Rossetti ever executed, the picture, however, being christened *Mariana*, not the Mariana of Tennyson's *Moated Grange*, but the Mariana of *Measure for Measure*. The scene, if definite enough to be specified, is in a chamber in "the Moated Grange at St. Luke's," when the page sings to his mistress the lovely little song beginning (*vide* Scene 1 Act iv.)—

"Take, O, take those lips away,  
That so sweetly were forsworn."

Mariana sits listening to the boy as he sings the sweet words in a low voice to the tune lightly stricken from his lute and has let fall some embroidery at which she

has been working, partly to catch the meaning and the strain of music and partly in reverie; the boy looking towards her as he leans over the soft red-covered couch on which she rests. She is robed in a silken dress of a deep and wonderful blue, full of the most exquisite gradations, and in the circlet clasping her waist are two roses, one red and one pink; the figure is large and luxuriously moulded, and the face beautiful, certainly not one whom Angelo would have discarded if her "promised proportions had not come short of composition" owing to the unfortunate wreck of the dowry-bearing ship of her brother Frederick. The boy will scarce have finished his repeated "sealed in vain, sealed in vain," ere the disguised Duke will enter on his certainly original scheme of "measure for measure," and Mariana bid the boy break off his song and haste away. The gorgeous depth of blue here attained constitutes a lasting charm in itself, and could have been painted by no one not at least equalling the great Venetian colourists.

It was early in this year that Rossetti commenced his largest and by many considered his most important picture, the magnificent *Dante's Dream*, the original water-colour of which having, it will be remembered, been painted in 1855. I need hardly again quote in full the passage from the *Vita Nuova* which it illustrates, as though the version in *Dante and his Circle* excels that descriptive of the early work, the general tenor is of course the same. It will be recollected that Dante in a vision is troubled with strange portents leading on to the fatal goal of the death of Beatrice, whom he sees lying in her chamber with ladies covering her with a veil, the only relief to

his passionate sorrow being the prior vision of "a multitude of angels who were returning upwards, having before them an exceedingly white cloud; and these angels were singing together gloriously, and the words of their song were these: '*Osanna in excelsis.*'" But to those not familiar with the *Vita Nuova*, that pathetic history of the great Florentine's love, the following verses therefrom will prove a finer explanation and introduction to the painting than any words of mine could supply, these stanzas being the poetic narration of what has been already told in prose:—

- " I was a-thinking how life fails with us  
Suddenly after such a little while;  
When Love sobb'd in my heart, which is his home.  
Whereby my spirit wax'd so dolorous  
That in myself I said, with sick recoil:  
' Yea, to my Lady too this Death must come.'  
And therewithal such a bewilderment  
Possessed me, that I shut mine eyes for peace;  
And in my brain did cease  
Order of thought, and every healthful thing.  
Afterwards, wandering  
Amid a swarm of doubts that came and went,  
Some certain women's faces hurried by,  
And shriek'd to me, 'Thou too shalt die, shalt die!'
- " Then saw I many broken hinted sights  
In the uncertain state I stepped into.  
Meseemed to be I know not in what place,  
Where ladies through the street, like mournful lights,  
Ran with loose hair, and eyes that frighten'd you  
By their own terror, and a pale amaze:  
The while, little by little, as I thought,  
The sun ceased, and the stars began to gather,  
And each wept at the other;  
And birds dropp'd in mid-flight out of the sky;  
And earth shook suddenly;  
And I was 'ware of one, hoarse and tired out,

Who ask'd of me : ' Hast thou not heard it said ? . . .  
Thy lady, she that was so fair, is dead.'

" Then lifting up mine eyes, as the tears came,  
I saw the angels, like a rain of manna,  
In a long flight flying back heavenward ;  
Having a little cloud in front of them,  
After the which they went and said, ' Hosanna ;'  
And if they had said more, you should have heard.  
Then Love said, ' Now shall all things be made clear :  
Come and behold our lady where she lies.'  
These 'wilderling phantasies  
Then carried me to see my lady dead.  
Even as I there was led,  
Her ladies with a veil were covering her ;  
And with her was such very humbleness  
That she appeared to say, ' I am at peace.'"

The first impression this great picture makes upon the sympathetic spectator is of the extraordinary depth, harmony, and beauty of the colour, a charm that grows and grows with each renewed inspection, and which, apart from every other merit of interpretive imagination and technical skill, would alone entitle its painter to rank amongst the highest not only in England but in any modern school in Europe. It is a great thing that it has been secured for a public institution, for the example of such work is needful to the rising generation of artists in these days when, with much that is of true worth and great importance, too much in the "slapdash" style is being copied from European, especially French, cliques. The word now with many young men in London, emulous of the cheap and ready-made reputations gained in Paris, is that careful workmanship and artistic finish are signs of talent, but that genius is best proved by slovenliness (which they call "freedom") and audacious parodyings of nature (which



they term "subtle but broad interpretations"); to such an extent, indeed, has this come, that nothing more absurd and utterly fatuous than some recent so-called "æsthetic" productions by certain London artists it would be impossible to surpass by the vulgarest and silliest follies of the amateurish but pretentious young gentlemen of Paris.

Returning to *Dante's Dream*, I may say that I have heard more enthusiastic and disinterested praise of this work than of any modern picture,—praise and delight not alone in those acquainted with the painter or disciples of Rossettian and allied schools, but manifested also by many whose art education has been amongst the masterpieces of older art, and by one or two who had disliked what little else they had seen by the artist. But the following extract will be of especial interest, being as it is a testimony from one of our chief living artists and greatest draughtsmen, Sir Noel Paton; the letter from which it is taken being written to me not long after the latter's last visit to Rossetti in July 1881 :—

"I was so dumfounded by the beauty of that great picture of Rossetti's, called *Dante's Dream*, that I was unable to give any expression to the emotions it excited—emotions such as I do not think any other picture, except the *Madonna di San Sisto* at Dresden, ever stirred within me. The memory of such a picture is like the memory of sublime and perfect music; it makes any one who *fully* feels it—*silent*. Fifty years hence it will be named among the half dozen supreme pictures of the world."

That this generous tribute was thoroughly appreciated by the painter of *Dante's Dream* will be evident in the following letter, which, though I have almost wholly

avoided at present making use of correspondence, either addressed to myself or others, for reasons fairly obvious, will be found alike interesting as proof of Rossetti's gratitude and as a testimony of the high and loyal regard in which he held Sir Noel Paton. The letter reached me during an autumn visit in Scotland, and I remember the surprise I experienced when I saw "Cumberland" at the head of the letter instead of "16 Cheyne Walk," as I did not realise when I saw him in London shortly before I left that he really contemplated a change, a thing that had become foreign to his habits and inclinations.

"CUMBERLAND,  
"Tuesday (September /81).

"MY DEAR SHARP—You see I have left London, but am rather unsettled as to my movements. I was absolutely more gratified and flattered than I can express by so warm and, I know, *heart-felt* an expression of praise, nay, enthusiasm, from so truly great and high-minded an artist as Sir Noel Paton. I trust you have already given my love to him,—pray now couple it with my brotherly thanks.

"I do not know whether you could prevail on yourself to spare me so interesting a letter in the original autograph,—I should value it most highly, and I will add that I believe such a testimonial to the estimation of the picture in such a quarter might greatly strengthen the confidence of the most vigorous and well-meaning men in Liverpool, who have accomplished its purchase in the teeth of no small difficulties. I think this letter to *you* might produce a more satisfactory effect than even one addressed direct to *myself*, which I should not otherwise hesitate to request from Sir Noel. . . . .

Your affectionate,

D. G. ROSSETTI."

The most striking individual characterisation in the picture is that of Dante, which, though founded upon the well-known portrait by Giotto, yet differs there-

from to a considerable degree, mainly in the youthfulness of aspect. Giotto's Dante while a young man is unmistakably of maturer years than Rossetti's; and though the latter may be a truer conception of the Florentine as he appears to us in the *Vita Nuova*, the brooding ecstatic lover, the representation of Giotto more resembles what we would most naturally conceive of him who could both worship an ideal love and fight with manly valour upon the field of Campaldino. In a word, Giotto's portrait is that of Dante, Rossetti's that of Dante as seen through the medium of Rossetti's spirit; and though as a portrait the one possesses far greater value and interest than the other, yet that of the later painter is fitting under the circumstances of the representation, indeed may be said to be more fitting than Giotto's could well be. Certainly, if the youth of *Dante's Dream* lacks certain qualities visible in the Florentine wall-painting by the poet's great contemporary, still less does it resemble the stern mask taken after death, save in a certain ruggedness and foreboding, as it were, of sorrowful manhood. Any portraiture of Beatrice must of course be purely imaginary, for no authentic likeness of the daughter of Folco Portinari exists; so that Rossetti's presentment of her in this, as in others of his "Dante" pictures, will be agreeable to the preconception of some and quite the reverse to that of others.

The chamber wherein she lies dead is as much a portion of his imaginative conception as aught else. It is a large room, not exactly of mediæval and still less of modern aspect; to the left and right of it being winding stairs, that on the right of the picture winding downwards, and that on the left upwards, both opening

upon the sunlit but desolate Florentine streets. Over the couch whereon she is laid of whom the people were wont to say, "This is not a woman, but one of the beautiful angels of heaven," is a lamp from which issues an expiring flame; and nailed to the rafters at one end is a scroll bearing the inscription, *Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo! facta est quasi vidua domina gentium!* only a portion of the sad lamentation of Jeremiah, however, being decipherable. Along the frieze are roses and violets, flowers typical of the beauty and purity of Beatrice, and on the floor are strewn scarlet poppies, symbolical of sleep and death. Winging upward and downward either stairway are two crimson doves, typifying still further than his actual presentment the presence of Love; and through an aperture in the roof is caught a glimpse of angelic figures, each clad in rosy flame-coloured garments, bearing with them in their upward flight a white burthen which is supposed to be the soul of Beatrice. On a couch in the centre of the composition rests, clad in white robes, the mortality of her who was now singing "under the banner of the Blessed Queen Mary;" her face is pale in death but beautiful as in life, and over the pillow on which her head rests and adown her shoulders flows her golden hair, while across the virginal breast the delicate white hands are crossed,—

"And with her was such very humbleness,  
That she appeared to say, 'I am at peace.'" }

At either end of the couch stands a lady, holding up between them an outstretched pall or canopy of purple colour, and both clad in varying green; in the canopy itself being sprays of fragrant May blossoms, signifi-

cant of the spring-time of life. The slightly stooping figure of Dante is clad in black, with a lighter shadow of purple here and there interfused, and between him and the couch is the person of Love, a youth in a garb of flame colour—the hue in which the personification of love is almost invariably represented by Rossetti. With one hand Love leads Dante forward, the latter advancing with reluctant gait and sorrowful but awed mien, and with the other he clasps an arrow and some apple-blossom sprays, at the same time stooping forward to take the kiss which he who was her lover from nine years of age did not, even in death, feel himself entitled to take.<sup>1</sup> Fastening together his

<sup>1</sup> In the *Vita Nuova* Dante records the age of himself and Beatrice, at their first meeting, in this quaint fashion: "Nine times already since my birth had the heaven of light returned to the selfsame point, etc. . . . She had already been in this life for so long as that, within her time, the starry heaven had moved towards the eastern quarter one of the twelve parts of a degree; so that she appeared to me at the beginning of her ninth year almost, and I saw her almost at the end of my ninth year," the difference being about nine months. He further records that "her dress, on that day, was of a most noble colour, a subdued and goodly crimson, girdled and adorned in such sort as best suited with her very tender age;" the day being in May 1274, during a festival given by her father Folco Portinari, and where the young Dante accompanied his father Alighiero Alighieri. Exactly nine years later the youthful lover again saw Beatrice Portinari, this being the occasion of the famous first salutation, the hour thereof being the ninth of the day; but two or three years later Beatrice was married to Simone de' Bardi, an event Dante never directly refers to. When only in her twenty-fifth year she died, and here again Dante records at length the fact of the significant number "nine" being in close alliance with his lady Beatrice; her death taking place in the first hour of the 9th of June 1290, and the poet's record being, "I say, then, that according to the division of time in Italy, her most noble spirit departed from among us in the first hour of the ninth day of the month; and according to the division of the time in Syria, in the ninth month of the year; . . . also she was taken from among us in that year of our reckoning . . . in which the perfect number (viz. *ten*) was nine times multi-

crimson garment at the shoulder is a scallop-shell, typical of Love's wandering to and fro upon the earth.<sup>1</sup> This dignified, solemn, and in every sense masterly work was finished late in 1871, a notice in the *Athenæum* of that date announcing "we have great satisfaction in stating that it will be publicly exhibited by itself in London in the spring," an event, however, that never came off. It was purchased while still on the easel by Mr. William Graham, but on its eventually being sent to the residence of that gentleman it was found to exceed the agreed-on dimensions, so much so that its hanging in a suitable room was impracticable save by inconvenient and expensive alterations. Considerably to the chagrin of the artist it was on this score hung for some time on the staircase, and so it came about that Rossetti agreed to exchange it for a smaller one. It was next purchased by Mr. L. R. Valpy, who, on leaving town, had to his great regret to take advantage of the artist's generous offer to take it back. Ultimately, in 1881, it was purchased by the Corporation of Liverpool for the comparatively speaking moderate sum of 1500 Gs., and can henceforth be viewed by any one

plied within that century wherein she was born into the world ; which is to say, the thirteenth century of Christians." He then goes further into metaphysical and astrological speculations, the end of which is to prove Beatrice a special creation, a separate miracle, "whose only root is the Holy Trinity." It may be doubted if Dante's somewhat naive after-statement would be challenged by any one, however "subtle :"—"It may be that a more subtle person would find out for this thing a reason of greater subtilty."

<sup>1</sup> With regard to the youthful figure of Love it may be of interest to know that the model Mr. Rossetti especially desired, and succeeded in obtaining, was Mr. J. Forbes Robertson, who has since made such a wide and deserved reputation on the stage.

desirous of seeing it at the Walker Art Gallery in that city. Subsequently a fine but much smaller dimensioned replica (still a large picture, however) was made for Mr. Graham, this painting being further distinguished by a predella in two partitions, the right representing Dante on his couch dreaming the portentous dream in which occurs the vision which the picture itself exemplifies, and the left that moment when he wakes from his strange trance, and, attracted by his sudden cry of anguish, certain ladies near at hand come hastily in unto him to soothe and sympathise with the bodily or spiritual malady that caused the cry of suffering. In *Dante's Dream* Rossetti may be said to have reached that lofty height the first ascent towards which was made more than twenty years previously in the 1849 sketch for *Dante and Beatrice*.

In 1871, in addition to finishing the great picture just described, the artist painted a water-colour replica of the *Beata Beatrix*, in reality a second study towards the large oil replica of Lord Mount-Temple's picture belonging to Mr. Graham, executed in 1872, and already specified when describing the original of 1863-64. Also to 1871 belong *Water Willow* and a finished chalk drawing, the latter being a fine study for the dead Beatrice in *Dante's Dream*. The small oil called *Water Willow* includes a view of the house in Kelmscott, where Rossetti and his friend William Morris lived for some time; a beautiful little painting that the artist valued highly, and which, for a long time, he refused to part with. It was about 1872 that a third replica of the *Beata Beatrix* was painted this time in water-colour and much smaller; for the sensitive scruples that so long prevented his acceding to the request by

a valued friend for a replica of the original were no longer effectively existent. In this year also was painted a picture which more than one fitting judge has considered to be a masterpiece in harmonious effect, the exquisite *Veronica Veronese*. On the frame is inscribed the passage in the *Lettres de Girolama Ridolfi*, which contains the *motif* of the picture :—*Se penchant vivement, La Veronica jeta les premières notes sur la feuille vierge. Ensuite elle prit l'archet du violon pour réaliser son rêve ; mais avant de décrocher l'instrument suspendu, elle resta quelques instants immobile en écoutant l'oiseau inspirateur, pendant que sa main gauche errait sur les cordes cherchant le motif suprême encore éloigné. C'était le mariage des voix de la nature et de l'âme,—l'aube d'une création mystique.* La Veronica is seated before a kind of cabinet, and is clad in a dress of a beautifully-shaded olive green, above it and around the neck and shoulders trailing negligently a white neckerchief; while the soft auburn hair is drawn wavily back from the fair face, with its yearning spiritual expression, as she rests *quelques instants immobile en écoutant l'oiseau inspirateur*. The latter is a pure yellow canary, the cage containing it being in the upper right corner of the picture, and surmounted with a small fragment of red worsted (painted, of course, for colour contrast), and with some pale green worsel seed hanging from it; in the background is a patterned curtain of almost similar pale green, falling in beautiful folds. The chair on which she sits is of a dull red hue, and the girdle round her waist is of reddish purple with a gold tassel, pendent therefrom being a feather fan, the feathers black, with orange bars, and having soft white fluff at their ends; while on the table or cabinet-



desk is a yellow daffodil and some pale yellow prim-roses, and below it, on a stool in front of her knees, a glass jar containing some seven or eight more daffodils. Before her is the score of a musical composition, one bar only being painted on the page opened out; while the dark brown violin, the strings of which she stirs with the fingers of her left hand, hangs suspended before her from the upper part of the cabinet, the bow being held poised in her right. This picture is one the loveliness of which is apparent at once and yet grows more and more with acquaintance, a picture that seems haunted with distant echoes of soft low music, such as we discern again, though hardly so exquisitely, in *La Ghirlandata* and *The Sea-Spell*, the harmony of colour throughout being never disturbed and the listening expectant attitude and rapt visionary outlook of the dark blue eyes of La Veronica being more than fully interpretive of the passage which it illustrates. Truly *le mariage des voix de la nature et de l'âme,—l'aube d'une création mystique.*

The year after *La Veronica Veronese* was painted Rossetti finished another exceedingly fine and impressive work, the acute note of which may also be said to be music, the picture in question being the large oil known as *La Ghirlandata*. It is so called signifying one who is crowned or garlanded, or who sits amongst natural garlands of twining flowers. There is a magnificent sumptuousness of colouring in this picture that entitles it to rank amongst the first of those works which have already been compared to the achievements of Titian and Giorgione; and if the *Mariana* and *The Blue Bower* be specially considered pictures with an exquisitely harmonious predominance

of blue, so may *La Ghirlandata* be considered pre-eminently a painting of rich greens, whose depth and variety are constantly brought out by blues of different tones. The Lady of the Garlands sits in the midst of a fragrant bower where the myrtle twines with the green leaves of a spreading tree, and with one hand she draws from the garlanded harp by her side such melodies as make even the young angels or winged cherubim of her sphere listen lovingly, and irradiates her own face with a yearning look as though she heard indefinitely sounds too sweet for their full significance to be apprehended. At her right, near the rich dark brown of the harp, trails a lovely tendril, and in front are the brilliant blue blossoms of the aconite; through the dense green copse behind a blue bird flits like a wandering streak of azure, and above the large harp crowned with sweet-scented roses and honey-suckles, and the intertwining myrtle and forest boughs, lean the angelic heads of her heavenly listeners, as note after note swells out on the fitful wind. The hour is that when the sunset glory is really but a fading memory, when the crimson cloudlet deepens into the purple that is amethyst and the gold and pink into dove; so that beyond the clustering greenery there is caught a glimpse of evening sky, of that depth and absolute serenity which foretells windless and perfect calm. The face of *La Ghirlandata* is spiritual and beautiful, her deep blue eyes transfused with the secret of the music, and around her head and neck a wealth of rich dark-auburn hair. It is one of those great pictures by Rossetti which could hardly ever become really popular, for its appeal is not that of a representation of the actual but of the ideal; it deals not

with easily-understood domestic sentiment, but with what has to a few special spiritual significance. During this year Rossetti made a crayon portrait of Dr. Gordon Hake, the author of *Parables and Tales*, a fine head of the Wordsworthian, meditative type; and also a study of his friend Mr. George Hake, which though not so successful as a portrait is, I have been told, very remarkable as a study. In addition to these were three chalk portraits, one of Lady Mount-Temple, one of Mrs. William Rossetti,<sup>1</sup> and one of Mrs. Coronio.

Subsequent to the commencement of *La Ghirlanata* was also begun the fine picture entitled *Dis Manibus*, but it was not finished till late in 1874. *Dis Manibus* represents a Roman widow sitting on the marble tomb of her husband, the occasion being one of those that occurred two or three times in the course of the year when mortuary rites had to be celebrated. The picture is thus as often as not called *The Roman Widow*. She is clad in robes of beautifully modulated silver and brownish grays, and with either hand elicits low mourning music from two harps, whose frames are of tortoise-shell and crowned with a beautiful cluster of wild roses. On the carved stone urn is written the funeral inscription, of which the invariable first two words are the title of the painting:—

“Dis Manibus  
L. Ælio Aquino  
Marito Carissimo  
Papiria Gemina  
Fecit  
Ave Domine \* Vale Domine;”

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<sup>1</sup> This fine portrait in tinted crayons was executed in 1874, the year of Mr. and Mrs. W. M. Rossetti's marriage.

and beneath this urn is a wreath of gorgeous roses, not the delicate pink of the wild roses round the harp she plays with her left hand, but the glowing hues of the heavy blooms of the garden. The girdle of solid silver which she wore upon her wedding day is now twined round the urn containing the ashes of the beloved dead, pendent also from the carven stone being a bronze lamp. Around her fair and expressive but sorrowful face the soft hair is looped, and a white veil falls in folds round her head and neck; the soft grays and whites throughout the picture being exquisitely contrasted in the green marble seat on which she rests, and the marble wall of similar hue curiously veined and shaded which forms the background. In none of his pictures has the artist shown greater mastery over the technique of his art than in *Dis Manibus*, which, though not so rich in varied hue and depth of colour as *The Blue Bower* or *La Bella Mano*, equals either of these technical masterpieces in exquisite finish.

In 1874 were also drawn two fine portrait-studies in crayon, one in profile and the other in three-quarter full face for the pitiful and gracious *Donna della Finestra* of the *Vita Nuova*;<sup>1</sup> and in the following year two other drawings deserve special notice, the first, in chalk, being an important life-size portrait of Mrs. Charles A. Howell, and the second a finely-finished pencil portrait drawing dated 15th February 1875.

<sup>1</sup> Though the second finished study for *La Donna della Finestra* this is a crayon picture complete in itself. Its titular lines are from the second sonnet in the *Vita Nuova* on the *Compassionate Lady*—*Color d'amore e di pietà sembianti* (rendered by Rossetti as "Love's pallor and the semblance of deep ruth"). This fine composition I find should be dated four years antecedent to its mention here, viz. in 1870.

To return to 1874, there were painted and finished two or three important oils, one of which more than one competent critic has declared to be in the very front rank of the artist's conceptions, namely, the *Proserpina*; and in addition to these a crayon drawing of the subject that was mentioned under date 1869 with the title *Rosa Triplex*, and two important drawings in chalk. One of the latter is a portrait in tinted crayons of Mr. Theodore Watts, the well-known writer and Rossetti's dearest friend of late years, an admirable piece of work in itself and ably interpretive of its subject, being indeed one of the most successful direct portraiture the artist ever accomplished; and the other drawing is a full length of Dante, executed in black chalk. *The Damosel of the Sanct Grail*, a non-commissioned picture purchased from the easel by Mr. George Rae, is a return to the period wherein the cycle of Arthurian legend afforded Rossetti frequent inspiration, is, indeed, the last Arthurian picture he painted or designed. It illustrates the lines from *Mort d'Arthur*: "Anon there came a dove, and in her bill a little censer of gold, and therewithal there was such a savour as if all the spicery of the world had been there. So there came a damozel, passing young and fair, and she bore a vessel of gold between her hands." The damsel stands amidst clustering vine-leaves, clothed quaintly in reddish garments and holding in her hands the golden cup, while above her is the dove (with wings of such extent, it may be mentioned, as no dove was ever gifted with save on canvas) clasping in its bill the chain supporting the censer of gold, wherein abides a savour "as if all the spicery of the world were there." Her left hand is poised as if to enforce silence; the fair face

beneath the auburn hair, which is here and there of a bronzy red, seems spellbound, and in her eyes is the dreamy listening look of one who sees farther than the mere externals which are apprehended by any casual gaze.

A richer-toned and much more advanced work is the highly-finished *Fleures de Marie*, the title being merely a title signifying nothing beyond the fact that yellow, which may be said to be the key in which this colour harmony is struck, is strongly marked in the marigolds and yellow lilies in the centre of the painting, supposedly *Fleures de Marie*. I understand the picture is sometimes also called *The Gardener's Daughter*, not necessarily, however, her of Tennyson's idyl; and certainly it is the more expressive of the two titles despite the general irresemblance in her garments and surroundings to one in the humble if poetic occupation inferred. I have heard it spoken of as one of his few *modern* paintings, but while not of necessity belonging to any definite period it undoubtedly assimilates much more to earlier epochs than the nineteenth century; though in description there is certainly nothing that would prevent its being a painting from life and actual surroundings. Such could, perhaps, quite well have been the case; the impression it gives me, however, is not that of being meant as a specifically modern portraiture, though on the first occasion I saw it I was of such an opinion. A lady of the true Rossettian type is standing in a room where the chiar-oscuro effects are particularly fine; her face being in profile, and her arms upraised as she places some yellow kingcups or marshmallows and yellow lilies in a blue vase on the top of a high oaken sideboard or

cabinet. Her dress is of green-blue, of varying shades throughout, over it being a sage-green apron; and on her head a close-fitting dark velvet cap or hood. Near at hand, effective against the dark grain of the polished oak, is a transparent tumbler containing water, and leaning therefrom a spray of delicate green. It is one of those works which the artist would twenty years back have despaired of accomplishing, because the mastery over chiaroscuro and depth and harmony of colour here so noticeable was then hardly with the severest labour even approximately attainable. Beyond this *motif*, if such term may be thus used, there is nothing in the picture.

The *Proserpina* has been replicated five or six times (with important variations as to drapery), attesting thus not only the great impression it had made, but also the high consideration in which the artist held it himself, though latterly he used to say half jokingly that of none of his paintings was he more heartily sick, owing to the time he had altogether spent at the easel over the different copies.

No reader could have failed to have noticed the fine sonnet, with its duplicate in Italian, printed in the *Ballads and Sonnets* of 1881, wherein the unhappy Queen of Hades speaks that which in the picture finds utterance in her expression. The original oil is in the possession of Mr. Leyland, and the replicas as follows:—Mr. Turner's, 1877; Mr. Graham's, 1880; Mr. Hutton's (water-colour), 1880; oil belonging to Mr. Valpy, 1881; and another, I think in tinted crayons, belonging to Mrs. Morris.

*Proserpina*, painted life-size, stands in a corridor of the palace of Pluto in Hades, where the sombre light

of the under regions prevails, and only a casual ray from the moon, as it circles above the earth, penetrates the surrounding gloom, and strikes with cold bluish refulgence upon the wall. In this weird, bluish light an ivy tendril on the wall is thrown into strong relief, curved and pliant in shape, but with elsewhere upon the wall the darkness of the unending night; and in the same transitory gleam the face and form of the Sicilian is brought into perfect prominence. She is clad in a robe of steel-blue colour and her hair is of the deepest and darkest brown as it falls in close and wavy masses from her bent head and down her delicate shoulders; in her hand she holds the pomegranate, the (in her case) fatal seed of which she has already eaten; while before her, in the lower right corner, the pale, thin smoke from an incense-burner curls upward, more and more indefinitely as it ascends and fades into the darkness above. Her face is pale, and the eyes have in them a light such as never shone from them while she wandered amongst the flowers of Enna, and her full lips have now no laughter upon them, nor are even languorous, but are firm with the knowledge of her irremediable evil. This is what we learn from the painting, and the sonnet carries on the design by embodying the inner speech that stirs her to the heart:—

" Afar away the light that brings cold cheer  
Unto this wall,—one instant and no more  
Admitted at my distant palace-door.

Afar the flowers of Enna from this drear  
Dire fruit, which, tasted once, must thrall me here.

Afar those skies from this Tartarean gray  
That chills me : and afar, how far away,  
The nights that shall be from the days that were.



Afar from mine own self I seem, and wing  
Strange ways in thought, and listen for a sign :  
And still some heart unto some soul doth pine,  
(Whose sounds mine inner sense is fain to bring,  
Continually together murmuring)  
'Woe's me for thee, unhappy Proserpine !''

Although somewhat repetitive of what has already been said, the following extract from a letter by the artist relative to the replica belonging to Mr. Turner will be read with interest:—"The figure represents Proserpine as Empress of Hades. After she was conveyed by Pluto to his realm, and became his bride, her mother Ceres importuned Jupiter for her return to earth, and he was prevailed on to consent to this, provided only she had not partaken of any of the fruits of Hades. It was found, however, that she had eaten one grain of a pomegranate, and this enchained her to her new empire and destiny. She is represented in a gloomy corridor of her palace, with the fatal fruit in her hand. As she passes, a gleam strikes on the wall behind her from some inlet suddenly opened, and admitting for a moment the light of the upper world ; and she glances furtively towards it, immersed in thought. The incense-burner stands beside her as the attribute of a goddess. The ivy-branch in the background (a decorative appendage to the sonnet inscribed on the label) may be taken as a symbol of clinging memory." The label referred to is a white scroll attached to the wall in the upper left corner, bearing upon it the already quoted sonnet in its Italian version with its woful ending, "Oimè per te, Proserpina infelice !" On the base of the frame is written the quoted sonnet, and there is also the inscription (at any rate on Mr. Leyland's, and one or two others) *Dante Gabriele Rossetti*

*Ritrasse nel Capodanno del 1874.* The central *motif* of this great picture is the poetic idea, differing entirely therefore from such work as *The Blue Bower* and *Les Fleures de Marie* but uniting as it does the technical mastery which distinguishes these works with the intellectual emotion or spiritual insight of such compositions as *Sibylla Palmifera*, *Pandora*, *Venus Verticordia*, and others similar; it ranks with the highest of these latter, and perhaps deserves a place in the elect supreme trinity of Rossetti's works. In no one of his great designs has he surpassed the *Proserpina* in absolute impressiveness; brooding eyes, sad and beautiful face, dark massed hair, the almost unearthly light that the moon casts for a few brief moments into the gloomy corridors of Pluto's Palace, the thin film of curling smoke from the incense-burner, the metallic steel-blue of her robe, the ivy-branch in its abrupt relief, the fateful pomegranate in her hand,—all these have their inalienable place in the realisation of an impressive conception, and each at the same time seems artistically individual. Another painter might compose as beautiful a design with the same subject, another painter even *might* succeed in producing a like impressiveness, but it is impossible to conceive of any artist save Rossetti painting the *Proserpina* which has just been described. It is essentially original, essentially individual. In the little artistic work Rossetti accomplished during the last few months of his life are to be included the finishing touches to a replica of this picture; his actually last worked-at design being a replica in oil of the fine head and bust of Joan of Arc, the original of which was painted in water-colours in 1864.

In 1875 the most important achievement was the painting of the splendid picture which has been already mentioned as, from a strictly artistic point of view, one of his masterpieces, excelling even in depth of tone the equally highly-finished and lovely *Veronica Veronese*, the latter, however, ranking higher because of its greater significance. *La Bella Mano*, the work in question, is entirely a picture like *The Blue Bower* or *Les Fleures de Marie*, in the fact that pictorial effect was the only *motif*; it is indeed meaningless as a design and even incongruous, as in the introduction of angels as servitors to a lady washing her hands.<sup>1</sup>

The lady of *The Beautiful Hand* is represented life-size, and is one of those voluptuously beautiful yet far from sensual creations for which the pictorial genius of Dante Rossetti seemed pre-eminently fitted. She is standing with her face in partial profile, the deep blue eyes, the fair exquisitely-moulded face, the golden-auburn hair, and the white arms and rounded bosom making such a portraiture as it is the lot of few to meet with in real life: her dress is of a beautiful mauve-purple, with over her right shoulder a robe or cloak of soft carmine, and the scallop-shaped basin in which she is washing her white hands is of golden bronze, the water therein having a most exquisitely-

<sup>1</sup> As I have once or twice met with the misunderstanding, I take this opportunity of stating that there is no connection whatever between either one of the Borgia drawings and the water-colour called *Washing Hands* on the one hand, or between *Washing Hands* and *La Bella Mano* on the other. The large and beautiful finished study in crayons (without the accessories) for the latter, belonging to Mr. W. A. Turner, is also sometimes called *Washing Hands*. This is one of the most beautiful of all Rossetti's chalk drawings. Relative to the completed picture, see the last sonnet in *Ballads and Sonnets*, called also *La Bella Mano*.

painted yellow-gold reflection. Beyond the basin is an angelic attendant, clothed in white and with scarlet wings meeting behind her head ; in one hand holding a small tray of lustrous rings and bracelets, and in the other a single bracelet. This heavenly hand-maiden, if she may be so called, has a lovely girlish face, with soft dreamy brown eyes and soft brown hair, contrasting with the rich and noble womanhood of her who bears the name "La Bella Mano." Above the head of the angel to the left is a green china vase containing a purple convolvulus ; below this is a globular brazen vessel, surmounted by an ornamental bronze trophy, containing water ; beyond this again, towards the left margin, is a rack from which a white towel comes down to just above the basin ; and holding the lower folds of the towel is another attendant angel, clad likewise in a white garment slit down the arms and showing also the delicate white limbs, and with similar scarlet wing-plumes reaching from her head almost to her feet, bringing into soft relief the fair face with its tender hazel eyes under the shadow of her dark auburn hair. Below the scallop-shaped brazen basin rests on the floor a square green pot from which grows a lemon-tree with its delicate foliage and fruit ; and on the table behind "La Bella Mano" stands a green malachite jar, and near it a golden vessel, out of the first leaning some lucent hair-jewels ; beneath, against the white cloth of the toilet-table, lies a brilliant scarlet poppy and reaching up thereto the green leaves of a young rose-tree. In the background is a large mirror containing reflections of the red and yellow flames that twine and flash in the unseen fire. Altogether it is probably the picture that the greater number of fit

judges would select from his works if only one were to be specified as excelling in all mastership of artistic craft. The depth of tone and the richness and harmony of colour are such that the painting has in it elements of endless delight, a delight altogether apart from intellectual emotion but none the less thoroughly well founded and potent.

Contemporaneously with *La Bella Mano* (1875) are two studies or pictures relating to the *Blessed Damozel*, the one belonging to Mr. William Graham being the first study for the great picture. It consists of the figure only, the face being singularly spiritual and beautiful, transcending indeed in the beauty of spirituality the *Blessed Damozel* of the large oil paintings ; so noticeably, indeed, that it is ever afterwards difficult to reconcile oneself to the more sensuous and, under the circumstances, less fitting and ideal representation, and to refrain from wishing that the first conception—generally with Rossetti, in art at least, the best—had been adhered to. The other picture is an oil head, differing slightly both from the chalk study and the completed painting, and belongs to Lord Mount-Temple. It is painted against a gold ground, and the garment is more of the same brilliant colour and the hair more auburn than in the great picture belonging to Mr. Graham. There is little to add regarding the fine *Pandora* painted in this year to what was written concerning the large chalk drawing of 1869, except that it has all the impressiveness and poetic insight which distinguished the latter and the additional charm that comes from mastery over depth of tone and harmonious richness of the dominant colours. This was the painting that, as mentioned

early in the preceding chapter, was exhibited some five or six years ago in the Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts Exhibition. In 1875 were also executed a powerful design for a picture to be called *Desdemona's Death Song*, the highly-finished life-size study in tinted crayons of *Astarte Syriaca* and a small equally finished drawing in ink of the same, being the original design, also separate chalk drawings of the angelic heads in the same impressive picture, and in addition to these the powerful and poetic composition called *The Question*. This small drawing, sometimes also styled *The Unanswered Question* and *The Sphinx*, has been called the most original of Rossetti's designs, and though this may be fully admitted as regards treatment, it is, as the few intimate friends at this date are aware, indebted for suggestion to the fine poem by Mr. William Bell Scott called *The Sphinx*, where for the first time, if I am not mistaken, questions are propounded to the Sphinx instead of the latter being the mystic questioner in riddles. It is, however, thoroughly original in its carrying out, and beyond doubt a remarkable and interesting composition.

On a rocky ledge, amongst boughs covered with strange fruit, sits the Sphinx or Fate. It has upward-pointed wings like an eagle's, significant of human aspiration becoming half divine: the face is that of a man, with a narrow headband on which is the badge of the soul, and beyond the woman's bosom stretch the firm arms and relentlessly retentive claws of a griffin or dragon; the thighs are those of a satyr, and the feet of a lion or other fierce beast of prey—in all, signifying life from the lowest to the highest. Beyond the stony ledge in which, mysteriously silent and remote, sits

the strange Sphinx-like embodiment of Fate, stretches a long narrow fiord or creek of the sea with precipitous and unscalable cliffs shelving sheer down into its depths, floating quietly upon the still waters of which is a barque of antique build, that "which brought us hither." As in life the spiritual skies are never discerned, though witness of their existence is ever attainable, so here no skies are visible, but in the clear depths of the water the half-moon is mirrored as in an under atmosphere. The human figures in the design are three, typifying Youth, Manhood, and Old Age: that symbolising Youth has fallen in death beside the base of the Sphinx before he can even ask aright the question of the mystery of life which has entered into and saddened his being; in his right hand still holding in his limp grasp a spear with point turned towards the ground, while another has fallen on the ground before him. The face is such as we imagine for a Keats or a Shelley, and the expression of death is finely given both therein and in the limp and drooping attitude; the symbolism not only being that of the eager questioning into life's mystery which is an accompaniment of sensitive youth, but also of that other mystery, early death, with all its unfulfilled possibilities. "Manhood" has not succumbed like "Youth," but has reached the level of the ledge, where he thrusts back the heavy intervening boughs and with the strength and determination of his fulfilled years presses right against the motionless Sphinx, looking with unflinching eyes and set face into the inscrutable gaze. He fears no answer he may obtain, only an answer of some kind he is determined to have,—whether it be that the mystery of pain becomes

clear in ultimate release or that pain is indeed the very essence of life and as certain to environ our souls on all sides as the atmosphere does our bodies : but none the less he too fails in eliciting any response, for though he fears nothing and flinches not in his gaze, he finds the large far-seeing eyes still look beyond him, heedless, comprehending not, answering not. Behind "Manhood," toiling up the steep, comes "Old Age," his eager gaze fixed upon the Fate-Sphinx to read its riddle or ask the supreme question ; in one hand grasping his staff, and with the other the ledge over which he climbs, his gray locks falling about his face, and his eyes heedless of anything in life but the end of it. In connection with this design it is an interesting fact that within a day or two of his death Rossetti, who was then much interested in a projected miscellany to consist of poems and stories by himself and Mr. Theodore Watts, wrote two fine sonnets descriptive of this drawing which was to serve as frontispiece to the volume in question.

I do not think the artist intended it as a design for a picture, nor, as far as I am aware, did he ever even make a small replica of it in water-colour ; and in this he was right, for its success is in its *motif*, more than in its artistic qualities, and it is almost certain that if enlarged into a life-size or even smaller oil the difficulty of preserving the just balance between impressiveness of subject and thorough technique would not have been overcome. But this does not militate against its value and impressiveness as a pencil design, though even here the trained eye will be arrested by that faulty drawing which, more or less markedly, is wholly absent from few pictures by Rossetti—notably, in this instance, in



the figure of Youth. It is one of those designs which, like the *How They Met Themselves* and the *Mary Magdalene* drawing and the *Death of Lady Macbeth*, is as thoroughly complete and individually characteristic, though of small size and in pencil or ink, as, on the other hand, such paintings as the *Proserpina* or such chalk drawings as *Pandora*.

In 1876, besides finishing the oil painting *Pandora*, begun the previous year, Rossetti commenced two or three pictures which with others were completed in 1877. This last year was a most important one in the amount of work turned out, there being, besides a superb crayon study belonging to Mr. Rae called *The Magdalene* (one of the artist's most beautiful faces) and a finished chalk drawing preliminary to the picture called *The Day Dream*, the three great paintings, two of them over life-size, known as *Astarte Syriaca*, *The Sea Spell*, and *The Blessèd Damozel*. These are each poems on canvas, the poetic emotion having in each instance been the origin of their creation; in the case of the two first readers will also recollect explanatory sonnets, though *The Blessèd Damozel* really illustrates the poem and not the poem the picture. *Astarte*, the Syrian Venus, is represented in full face and of heroic size, and is as powerful and even more splendid a creation than the *Venus Verticordia*. She is standing in a dusky twilight, with behind her the setting sun almost of a gold that is blood-red, and on the other side the rising moon, under whose less ardent but weirder rays the rites of Venus' worship are to be held. She is clad in a robe of brilliant pale green fitting close to the massive limbs and abundant bosom, round her waist is a silver girdle, the upper portion of

which she clasps with one hand while the other rests above her hip ; and above the imperial face, with its strange, potent, fascinating eyes, is the densely clustered black hair which has that electric lustre sometimes seen in the dark tresses of women of the South ; again, palpitating thereover, shines the star of Venus, tremulous with pale violet light. Behind, at either shoulder, stand winged and worshipping ministers, each clothed in pure emerald colour with wings of that olive hue which we see in thick tongues of sea-weed tide-swayed to and fro ; and each bears a torch from whence the orange-yellow and deep-red flames and the heavy curling smoke ascend towards the weird light of the sky, where is neither night nor day, but the contending sun and moon. Steadfast, almost stern in her gaze, she looks forth with the same conscious sovereignty as Venus Verticordia, but her eyes are not as cold while amorous, not as relentless while enticing. She is herself a dream, and a dreamer of dreams ; she is the worshipped of the purple-mouthed, deep-breasted Syrian girl and the supplicated queen of the lithe bronze-skinned Syrian youth ; but she is not at the same time wholly remote from them, incapable of love's suffering, alien to passion. She too can love, and with more than human intensity, and whether in past or future vision her gaze is cognisant of some supreme though not immediate joy, dreamful of one who has or will yet tremble and flush and yield himself up wholly to the charm of those "love-freighted lips and absolute eyes."

Lacking the irresistible charm of facial impressiveness, at least in comparison with *Astarte Syriaca*, *The Sea Spell* is yet as attractive in its own way as, and even

excels in difficult workmanship successfully grappled with, its larger companion—companion in the sense of being finished about the same time in the same year, though the *Astarte* was really commenced in 1875. If the latter is an example of the artist's mastery over chiaroscuro and depth of subdued colour, the former as well exemplifies his mastery over the most brilliant tones and subtle contrasts of strong colours; thus technically one may prove as interesting as the other, though judging from the impressiveness of the poetic *motif* the palm must be given to *Astarte*, without thereby disparaging unduly the poetic significance of *The Sea Spell*. Rossetti *could* have charged this design with as full a significance as impresses us in *Lilith*, *Venus Verticordia*, and *Astarte Syriaca*, but though it is a fine picture, both technically and poetically, he cannot be said to have done so, and therefore, from the standpoint chosen by himself, that of poetic painting, it must be judged as not quite attaining the high standard of impressiveness exemplified so markedly in the other and kindred works. Any one thoroughly acquainted with the artist's work would conceive *The Sea Spell* to be one of his most impressive creations from the perusal of the fine sonnet in the *Ballads and Sonnets*, but though he would be more than gratified by the masterly artistic power throughout, he would in all probability find that the face, beautiful and expressive as it is, yet lacked in that supremely significant and spiritual expressiveness so characteristic of the artist at his highest. This lovely design, permeated with the very spirit of rich sensuous beauty, is more closely allied to the *Lady Lilith* than to any other of the artist's works. The beautiful Siren woman, who

weaves her melodious spell of enchantment, sits under a tree with dense green foliage and laden with ripe and ruddy apples, through the branches of which, and just above her head, flashes past in swift flight a white sea-bird, tempted from the waves by the wild notes of her irresistible music. She is clothed in a silvery-grayish robe, leaving the bosom and left arm bare, the luxurious white softness of the latter contrasting exquisitely with the almost metallic silver-grayness of the dress; and with her delicate hands she plays a large and curiously-stringed lute which is fastened by an iron circle and loop to a heavy inclined branch or bole in front, beyond which is seen the lovely blueness of a summer sea, on which sails nearer and nearer the unseen ship which bears one who shall not resist her spell—

“Till he, the fated mariner, hears her cry,  
And up her rock, bare breasted, comes to die.”

On her head, with its mass of golden auburn hair, is a wreath of large pink wild roses, beautiful certainly, but of such a dreamy “pinkness” as blooms in no natural wayside roses; and by her side grow the red and pale crimson flowers of the Venus Fly-Trap, a plant of the familiar snapdragon species, and here having a symbolism made apparent in the name itself. Her wealth of gleaming tresses trails on to the branches behind, and on her knee rests the base of the two-stringed lute whence issues under the magic touch of her fingers the sea-spell that draws all things to her influence, even the unwitting mariner who, lured from weary seas by the ineffable melody, comes ashore only to die without any rapturous embrace or happy ease:—

“ Her lute hangs shadowed in the apple-tree,  
While flashing fingers weave the sweet-strung spell  
Between its chords ; and as the wild notes swell,  
The sea-bird for those branches leaves the sea.  
But to what sound her listening ear stoops she ?  
What nether world gulf-whispers doth she hear,  
In answering echoes from what planisphere,  
Along the wind, along the estuary ?

“ She sinks into her spell : and when full soon  
Her lips move and she soars into her song,  
What creatures of the midmost main shall throng  
In furrowed surf-clouds to the summoning rune :  
Till he, the fated mariner, hears her cry,  
And up her rock, bare breasted, comes to die ?”

Of the *Blessed Damsel* there are two important oil paintings—one, the original, belonging to Mr. Graham ; and one with the face of the damozel of a different type, or rather expression, belonging to Mr. Leyland, and with other divergences so marked as to make it another painting and not a replica. The (on the whole) finer of the two, Mr. Graham's, is that which I shall refer to first.

There are many to whom the poems of Dante Rossetti still remain unread ; but even to the majority of these one poem must surely be more or less familiar, even if only in name—that, of course, called *The Blessed Damsel*. This beautiful and intensely individual lyric was amongst the first of the poet-painter's compositions ; it is indeed more marvellous that this should have been composed at the age of nineteen than that the picture bearing the same title should have been painted at the age of fifty. Indeed, it has been used as the chief illustration to the statement, which is greatly if not wholly true, that Rossetti was *born a*

poet and *made* himself an artist. There cannot be said to be any story in the poem, but the animating idea is that of a fair woman who has died in all the pride of youth and beauty and who in heaven awaits the coming of her lover, who still dwells on earth and who in the poem speaks once or twice in interlusive verses. The working out of the idea naturally involves very materialistic treatment, as in the Blessëd Damozel leaning over a parapet in heaven and looking down towards the earth; yet notwithstanding this the general effect is eminently spiritual, necessarily more so in the poem than in the painting, owing to the greater indefiniteness of words as a medium to any pictorial representation. The poem is too long to quote in full, and the verses throughout are too linked to bear separation well, so that I can only give one or two verses here, choosing those directly bearing upon the representation on canvas.

"The blessed damozel leaned out  
From the gold bar of Heaven;  
Her eyes were deeper than the depth  
Of waters stilled at even;  
She had three lilies in her hand,  
And the stars in her hair were seven.

"Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,  
No wrought flowers did adorn,  
But a white rose of Mary's gift  
For service meetly worn;  
Her hair that lay along her back  
Was yellow like ripe corn.

"Herseemed she scarce had been a day  
One of God's choristers;  
The wonder was not yet quite gone  
From that still look of hers;

Albeit, to them she left, her day  
Had counted as ten years.

"It was the rampart of God's house  
That she was standing on ;  
By God built over the sheer depth  
The which is Space begun ;

"It lies in Heaven, across the flood  
Of ether, as a bridge.

"Around her, lovers, newly met  
In joy no sorrow claims,<sup>1</sup>  
Spoke evermore among themselves  
Their rapturous new names ;

"And still she bowed herself and stooped  
Out of the circling charm,  
Until her bosom must have made  
The bar she leaned on warm,  
And the lilies lay as if asleep  
Along her bended arm.

{ "Her voice was like the voice the stars  
Had when they sang together.

"I wish that he were come to me,  
For he will come,' she said.  
'Have I not prayed in Heaven ? on earth  
Lord, Lord, has he not prayed ?  
Are not two prayers a perfect strength ?  
And shall I feel afraid ?'"

The figure of the Blessèd Damozel is clad in a robe of delicate blue, of which the folds are beautifully shaded and painted, and its poise as she leans with

<sup>1</sup> Or, according to the later version,  
*'Mid deathless love's acclaims*

her breast and one arm on the golden parapet is full of subtle grace and charm. In the luxuriant golden-auburn tresses of her hair shine with soft purplish-pink light five or six of the stars mentioned in the poem as her heavenly coronet; and trailed loosely round her neck is a scarf of silvery white suffused with saffron tones; while her dark-blue dreaming eyes and yearning face realise (though not so successfully as in the first studies or in Mr. Leyland's picture) the painter's ideal conception. Above her a glimpse is caught of the groves of Paradise, wherein, beneath the shade of the spreading branches of a vast tree, the newly-met lovers embrace and rejoice with each other on separation over and union made perfect at last: all clothed in deep-blue robes, looking almost like dark flowers amid the deep-green foliage. Below the bar on which she leans, with the three large white lilies "asleep along her bended arm," the bar made warm by the pressure of her bosom, are three angelic ministers or watchers with heads surrounded by halos of pale pink flame, and bearing green palms; those in the right and left clad in robes of vivid and uniform azure, and the angel or seraph in the centre in intense lucent sea-green. The expressions of all are beautiful and varying, the central presence being especially significant not so much of joy or pity, but as of one who contemplated for ever the sadness of long-deferred love and broken hopes; that of the others being tender and sympathetic, as though they heard from their heavenly place the sobs of him who on earth suffered grievously and almost with despair of reunion. The golden parapet, so high that the sun could scarce be seen and the earth seemed to spin far



below like a fretful midge, is covered over in part with masses of full roses, painted with that almost tropical luxuriance familiar to such as know the *Venus Verticordia*, *La Ghirlandata*, and others. The figure of the Blessèd Damozel is over life-size, and the picture altogether one of the largest Rossetti ever painted—transcended only by *Dante's Dream*, and equalled only by *Astarte Syriaca* if my memory serves me right. There is a very fine predella, or lower partition, attached to the picture, which is divided by two cross bars of the frame into three divisions; this predella consisting of a twilight landscape, wherein, shadowed by drooping boughs in some lovely glade, the lover lies and dreams by the side of a murmuring stream that glides softly through the dim darkness. The gleam on the underside of some of the leaves, and the diffused radiance of a wan though hidden moon upon the still, wandering water is finely painted. On the other hand, there is something to be said in favour of the objection I have heard brought forward, that this predella rather detracts from the idea sought to be given, at least in the poem, of remoteness of the Blessèd Damozel in her high place in the heavenly spheres; an objection, I confess, which I cannot personally agree with but which I can see militates against the full appreciation of some. The artist himself considered that by his predella he had greatly added to the effect of the central portion of the picture, not only artistically but emotionally, and in this judgment the majority will doubtless acquiesce. Possessing as it does supreme merit as a work of art, its great charm, after all, is in its poetic meaning and its wonderful expressiveness. The painting may practically be said to be the sug-

gestion of the artist's friend, Mr. William Graham; for though he had at times in his early life thought of transferring his conception to canvas he had never hitherto done so, and latterly the intention seems to have become wholly dormant; but on Mr. Graham's request and agreement to become the purchaser Rossetti, after a year or so of preliminary trial, at last entered heartily into its composition, though he never hesitated to say that of the two he had rather the poem should survive.

In the painting of the same subject belonging to Mr. Leyland (painted in 1879) the face and attitude are alike somewhat different, the former being finer in that it is more spiritual and the expression containing more of patient love and constant yearning, it having evidently been modelled more after the chalk drawing already mentioned than the face in the original oil. In this picture the background groups of lovers are omitted, and the predella, though the same in detail as that of 1877, is not quite so fine in its subtle lights and shades. The wings of the angelic ministers are of light reddish purple, the roses at the right side are red and full, and the robe of the Damozel is of pale green with white interfusions where the folds bend and droop, instead of perfect azure as before; and behind her are cherubim with scarlet wings. A beautiful picture indeed, and only inferior in comparison with that of 1877. In this year also, by-the-by (1877), was finished the fine oil replica of *Proserpina*, belonging to Mr. Turner, referred to in description some pages back.

The following year several drawings in chalk came from the artist's easel, and two important oils were

finished—*A Vision of Fiammetta* and the replica of *Dante's Dream*, with its double predella, described while mentioning the original of 1870, also a fine replica in water-colour of *Proserpina*. To this date belongs Rossetti's only original water-colour of very recent years, *Bruna Brunelleschi*—a study full of poetry and beauty.

Regarding the fine painting *A Vision of Fiammetta* readers of *Dante and His Circle* may recollect an able translation of a sonnet by Boccaccio, *Of His Last Sight of Fiammetta*, given on page 252: the only difference between the printed one and that accompanying the picture being in the first line, where “'Mid glowing blossoms and o'er golden hair” has been substituted for “Round her red garland and her golden hair.” After the completion of *Fiammetta* Rossetti commenced the impressive *Mnemosyne*, which, however, he did not finish till late in 1879 or early in 1880, under the latter of which dates it will be described. Amongst the chalk drawings, one is a replica, a *Pandora*; another is a characteristic study of a female head, after a well-known model, afterwards autotyped with the title *Perlascura*; and the third is a poetic composition called *The Spirit of the Rainbow*. This belongs to Mr. Theodore Watts, and illustrates a poem of his. It represents a female figure standing in a gauzy circle composed of a rainbow, and on the frame is written the following sonnet (the poem in question by Mr. Watts):—

#### THE WOOD-HAUNTER'S DREAM.

The wild things loved me; but a wood-sprite said:—  
“Though meads are sweet when flowers at morn uncurl,  
And woods are sweet of nightingale and merle,  
Where are the dreams that flush'd thy childish bed!—

The Spirit of the Rainbow thou would'st wed !"  
 I arose, I found her—found a rain-drenched girl  
 Whose eyes of azure and limbs of rose and pearl  
 Coloured the rain above her golden head.

But standing by the Rainbow-Spirit's side,  
 I saw no more the holy Rainbow's stains :—  
 To her by whom the glowing heavens were dyed  
 The sun showed nought but dripping woods and plains.  
 "God gives the world the Rainbow—*her* the rains—"  
 The wood-sprite laughed : "our poet finds a bride !"

Rossetti meant to have completed the design with the "woods and plains" seen in perspective through the arc ; and the composition has an additional and special interest from being the artist's only successful attempt at the wholly nude,—the "Spirit" being extremely graceful in poise and outline. A year or two previously Rossetti had executed another design founded on a composition by Mr. Watts, a romantic little Rosicrucian story. The drawing, which for the sake of a name I will call *Forced Music*, represents a nude half-figure of a girl playing on a mediæval stringed instrument elaborately ornamented. The face, which is of a type unlike that of any other of the artist's subjects, and extraordinarily beautiful, shows beyond all question that the girl is in captivity and supplying her music under compulsion.

In 1879 another replica in chalk of the *Pandora* design was executed, the last and undoubtedly (with one other) the finest of all, alike in detail, clearness of outline, and expressive power ; this also belongs to Mr. Watts. Mr. Valpy also has a *Pandora* equally complete and elaborate in design, and equally powerful and solemn in expression. In this year also, besides

the second *Blessèd Damsel* already described, were finished a drawing called *Sancta Liliās* and an oil named *La Donna della Finestra*, while the painting entitled *The Day-Dream* was begun, though not completed till near the close of 1880. Regarding this last fine painting, a great favourite with the artist himself, a descriptive sonnet will be found in the *Ballads and Sonnets*; the representation being that of a beautiful woman rapt in some "day-dream spirit-fann'd," while she sits in the summer silence under "the thronged boughs of the shadowy sycamore." The brown branches, with their large and beautifully-painted green leaves, make an ample shade for her to rest and indulge in vague reverie, while from the green depths of the sycamore the urgent music of a thrush thrills upon the warm air. She has been reading, but her thoughts have strayed far from the printed page, and it lies listlessly on her lap, while from her hand drops the blossom she had plucked for its fragrance; and "tow'rd deep skies, not deeper than her look, she dreams." Like the chalk-drawing of 1868 entitled *Reverie* this painting is permeated with the very spirit of dreamful meditation.

The large drawing in crayons called *Sancta Liliās* is one of those compositions where the spiritual expression of the female face is given with special success; in this instance the face as well as the expression being very beautiful, and not of so mannered a type as many of his later chalks. *Sancta Liliās* is the study for the Virgin in an *Annunciation* which was never begun, but whose loveliness certainly transcends the Mary of the *Girlhood* picture, or hers of *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. In the left upper corner of the composition is a white

scroll bearing the title, and on the white scarf, which with one hand she unfolds from the tall Annunciation lily she bears before her, are the words *Aspice lilia*; the haloed hair and face and simple drapery being finely drawn. Some months before this, however, *Fiammetta* was finished—that beautiful vision of Boccaccio's lady-love. She is clothed in a beautiful soft red, and with her left hand puts away from her with exquisite grace the apple-tree branch with its wealth of blossoms that encircles her. Her face is beautiful, and behind the head is an effulgence of soft light with the circled angel therein described in the sonnet. The natural painting is lovely throughout, the apple blossoms being especially fine, both those unshaken and those falling from the branch she bends above her with her right hand; and above this branch two butterflies of deep blue hover, and in the centre of the upper portion of the picture an outspread-winged and crested bird poises ere it takes flight.

It will be remembered that in 1869 Rossetti made a chalk drawing which he entitled *La Donna della Finestra*; but this was little more than a study for the figure in the completed picture, if it was not indeed simply a portrait in the first instance and during composition subsequently labelled the compassionate *Lady of the Window*.

Those who have read the *Vita Nuova* will recollect that after the death of Beatrice Dante was one day so overcome in his grief that even in the street it was made manifest in his countenance; and that, feeling ashamed of observance, he looked hastily to see if any were looking upon him, when he perceived only "a young and very beautiful lady who was gazing upon

[him] from a window with a gaze full of pity, so that the very sum of pity appeared gathered together in her." It, moreover, so happened that whensoever thereafter he was seen of this lady, "she became pale and of a piteous countenance, as though it had been with love." It is this Lady of the Window who is supposed by some, and by Rossetti himself (though in a footnote he refers to the supposition as only "a passing conjecture"), to be the Gemma Donati whom he afterwards married, a year or more subsequent to the death of Beatrice. On the frame of the picture is painted, as poetic illustration, Dante's pathetic sonnet beginning *Videro gli occhi miei quanta pietate*, and its English translation. La Donna della Finestra sits beside an open window in a large square-shaped and green-hued balcony, looking out on the unseen Florentine street wherein, it may be, at the very moment the great poet and sorrowful mourner is passing by. Her hair is of a deep rich-toned brown, close clustering to her head and forehead in the true Rossettian style, and in her soft gray-blue eyes there is the yearning pitiful look that so soothed the grief of Dante; her dress, only visible at the neck and left sleeve, is of a rich green, with over it a white robe which droops slightly over the window-sill as she leans therefrom, lying upon a flat portion of it being a pink rose from which delicate petals here and there have fallen away. Below the window grow upwards in clusters large and beautifully-painted fig-leaves, so finely painted indeed as to deserve the praise of being the finest individual bit of nature Rossetti ever painted, as the most exact Preraphaelite would be unable to surpass it in natural truth. Behind her are beautiful roses and rosebuds, pink and red, with the short green leaves

finely painted; and to her right is a carven pillar, beyond which and between others is seen the blue Italian sky dappled with white and purplish clouds. This is altogether an exceedingly fine composition, both in drawing and exquisite harmony of colour and arrangement of contrasts, and in nothing more so than the already mentioned fig-leaves. In common with *La Bella Mano*, it belongs to Mr. F. S. Ellis, a friend of Rossetti and the publisher of his works.

In 1880, besides two large water-colour replicas of *Proserpina*, there was begun a picture which he was unable to paint regularly thereafter and which he never lived to finish, although it was not far from completion when, after the artist's death, it was transferred to the possession of Mr. Leyland, viz. the *Salutation of Beatrice*. Early in the year was also finished a painting at which Rossetti had been engaged at different periods for some time previous, the fine and impressive design *Mnemosyne*; and in April he made a drawing illustrative of the *Sonnet on the Sonnet*, a highly-finished design in ink, and the same that forms the frontispiece to this volume. This he painted in Indian ink, as a frontispiece to a copy of Mr. David Main's *Treasury of English Sonnets*, which he presented to his mother on her birthday, in the floral design along the lower right corner being the inscription, "D. G. Rossetti, pro Matre fecit, 27:4:80;" a book that he valued highly himself, and which was thus made more valuable still. The *Sonnet on the Sonnet*, as it is given in this design, differs only from the printed copy in the use of the word "intricate" in place of "arduous" in the fifth line; and only a portion of the sonnet is illustrated. The figure is that of the animating



spirit, or soul, as signified by the word "anima" written in the upper corner; the harp is the sonnet, with fourteen strings for the fourteen lines of that form of composition; and the spreading branches of the tree represent the all-embracing aspects of life which the sonnet can apprehend and embody. The farther end of the branches terminates in a split coin, on one side of which is revealed the soul in its emblem the butterfly, and on the other the intertwined letters Alpha and Omega. The design is highly interesting, not only because of its correct drawing and novel style, but also from the fact that it is a pictorial tribute towards what Rossetti always considered his special vehicle in verse.

The painting called *Mnemosyne*, highly impressive as it is, will always have the drawback of non-originality with any one who has first seen the *Astarte Syriaca*, as not only are the contours of the face and the arrangement of the hair very similar, but so also is the colour of the robe in which she is clad. Indeed, though I am not certain if I remember aright, I fancy it was in the first instance commenced as a replica of *Astarte*, but at any rate this idea was soon dismissed, and the artist conceived the idea of utilising it so far as it had been proceeded with towards an ideal representation of memory; even with this new and fine *motif*, however, he took comparatively little interest in his picture, even going the length of referring to it as a kind of white elephant he did not know how to manage himself or afterwards dispose of to another. These fancies, mainly due as they were to capricious if not already shattered health, did not, however, interfere with the workmanship, and some time after the painting left the easel Rossetti acknow-

ledged that his half-real half-affected antipathy was unfounded, and that he had seldom, if ever, better succeeded in reaching his ideal of expressiveness. The figure of Mnemosyne is clad in a robe of brilliant sea-green with white lights throughout, leaving her olive-hued neck and bust bare and unclothing the rounded arms; her face is olive-pale and rounded in its contours, the eyes of a mystical dreamy shade of gray, and the black-brown hair with its metallic gleam clusters close to the head and shoulders in thick masses. In one hand she holds a bronze lamp from which issues a faint blue and purple flame, and in the other an antique oil cruse or chalice with delicate purplish flames like wings also issuing, these having their special symbolism as mentioned in the couplet inscribed on the frame—

“Thou fill’st from the winged chalice of the soul  
Thy lamp, O Memory, fire-winged to its goal.”

Below these, on the bole of a tree, lie a fir-spray and a yellow pansy, the significance of which is obvious; overhead lean the encircling branches of an olive-tree, and beyond is seen the dark-blue sky with heavy white and purplish clouds which have the subdued hues of a quiet sunset reflected faintly upon them, typifying the dreamy present with the far-off radiance of the past softening and making strange with old memories. In the eyes of Mnemosyne the past is made evident to her; she lives therein and in memories once fragrant in their realities but now somewhat bitter; she tastes again of dim pleasures long since forgotten, hears voices now alien, and thrills with the sound of low laughter long since stifled in unrecorded

death. She sees so far back, her gaze is so subtly interpenetrative, that it may be she sees farther than history can guide us,—the strange temples that were upreared to unknown gods, the olive-skinned dark-haired maidens singing in mystic rites, and white-robed priests with eyes burning in strange ecstasy: the ebb and flow of religions and human passions, hopes, aspirations, and longings. The past is evermore to her a dream that is reality, and she is the eternal dreamer thereof,—Mnemosyne, she who holds the secret of all things buried and forgotten.

In 1881 yet another replica was made of *Proserpina*, or rather begun, for it did not leave the studio till the following year; but at last that picture was finished, which mention was made of in 1867 as having been commenced at least in design, the *La Pia*. The story of her thus called will be remembered by those who have read the *Purgatory* of Dante, the unfortunate youthful wife having been confined by her husband, Nello dell' Pietra of Siena, to a fortress in the Maremma where the noxious vapours of that swampy district were most fatal. In his visionary journey through *Purgatory* Dante meets her spirit, and she says to him the words that are the *motif* of the painting:—

“ Ricorditi di me che son la Pia.  
Siena me fe', disfecemi Maremma ;  
Salsi colui che inanellata pria  
Disposando m'avea colla sua gemma.”

“ Remember me who am La Pia, me  
From Siena sprung and by Maremma dead.  
This in his inmost heart well knoweth he  
With whose fair jewel I was ringed and wed.”  
*Il Purgatorio, Canto V.*

La Pia in the picture is represented sitting behind the rampart of her prison fortress, looking forth upon the desolate plain of the Maremma, where over stagnant pools hover wan gray mists and poisonous vapours, her gaze now fixed upon the dreary prospect, now upon the ring with its oval cornelian with which upon a certain ill-starred day she was wedded. Over a dress of deep blue she wears a white transparent robe, with behind her a veil of a faint purplish hue; her dark hair falls in masses from her low forehead and sweeps backward down the shoulders, and her dark-gray pathetic eyes are fixed upon the ring on her wedding finger in sad contemplation. In front of her lie her breviary and letters beside a bronze sundial, with figured on it the angel of time wheeling the sun; and beyond these are the battlemented walls looking out upon the Maremma marshes, close under the ramparts of which are laid the steel lances of her husband's guards with his red banner lying upon them. Behind her are finely-drawn and painted ivy-leaves in clustering tendrils, and above her fig-leaves painted with the same exquisite finish as those in the picture of *La Donna della Finestra*. On the ramparts a bell is tolling in dismal funereal tones, sending its melancholy clang across the lifeless Maremma over which and just above the mouldy battlements some black ravens hover and sweep with ominous caws. The artist has fully succeeded in his aim, that of charging the composition with the insidious deathliness and depressing gloom of the Maremma, and of impressing upon the spectator that sense of indignant pity for the young and beautiful La Pia which Dante experienced when, with his guide Virgil, he passed through the

shadows of Purgatory. In his own opinion this painting contained some of his best work from nature, as in the ivy and fig leaves and the admirably-drawn ravens, as also in the perspective of the wide-spreading Maremmese marshes.

In 1882, the year when the exceptionally productive life of the artist-poet came to its untimely end, the only finished work was a replica in oil of the *Joan D'Arc* described under date 1864; but there are two paintings still to describe, one nearly finished, the *Salutation of Beatrice*, and the other the highly important but unfortunately still uncompleted *Found*, which the artist had been at work on for more than twenty years, or, to speak more correctly, which had been commenced more than twenty years ago.

It will be remembered that in the *Vita Nuova* Dante records his sensations at the exceeding grace of a salutation vouchsafed to him by Beatrice, in a sonnet commencing "My lady looks so gentle and so pure, when yielding salutation by the way," and in the picture the beautiful daughter of Folco Portinari is represented on her way to morning devotions, clad as in the vision he had of her nine years after their first childish meeting, in pure white. Dressed thus simply, and with her pale face (such as Dante tells us the face of Beatrice was wont to be) shrouded by the dark hair parted low over her forehead, the charm the painting exerts lies almost wholly in her expression, which is very tender and beautiful, albeit the mannerism of type is somewhat too marked. As she proceeds on her way, full facing the spectator of the painting, "crowned and clothed with humility," she carries in her arms her breviary in its yellowish cover; passing on her right a rose-tree with

many of the red blooms upon it and contrasting with the soft white of her dress, and on her left a large green jessamine in full flower. Behind her at some distance on the left is a stone balustrade, against a carved tomb or seat on which Dante leans, clasped almost round by the long scarlet wings of the figure of Love whose whole body is of the same ardent flame-colour ; the poet looking after the retreating Beatrice with a mixture of awe and worship, almost indeed with a look as of one dazed with excess of pure and sacred loveliness. It must be remembered that this excess of emotion is in thorough harmony with the spirit of the *Vita Nuova*, and that Dante records in all sincerity that "when she had gone by, it was said of many : *This is not a woman, but one of the beautiful angels of Heaven ;* and there were some that said : *This is surely a miracle ; blessed be the Lord, who hath power to work thus marvellously.*" Some distance behind the figure of Beatrice is an archway leading on to long corridors, but these are so very unfinished in the painting that nothing need be said of them beyond stating their existence, and that the artist considered they would ultimately be his best piece of architectural drawing, being especially free from those defects of perspective which he never wholly overcame. He took great care with this portion of the picture, sometimes getting rather despondent over the technical difficulties, relying for his model, as he did, chiefly upon architectural photographs of Siennese and Florentine ecclesiastical corridors, courts, and archways.

It may be remembered that mention was made of a water-colour drawing entitled *The Farmer's Daughter* being exhibited in the Royal Scottish Academy's Ex-

hibition in Edinburgh in 1862, where it was sent for sale by Rossetti from his then address in Chatham Place, Blackfriars; and that this drawing was referred to as an early "trial" of the subject he had chosen for a great painting of modern life, namely, the still unfinished *Found*, based, as mentioned under date 1853, upon verses in Mr. William Bell Scott's fine ballad called *Mary Anne*. This painting the artist intended should be an exemplification at once of his power to deal with a modern subject in art, as in poetry he did in his poem called *Jenny*, and to exhibit at a high point what he considered the essentially dramatic bent of his genius. The subject is the old familiar one of love ruined and gone astray, and at last overtaken with the hardest of all retributions. Against an ivy-covered graveyard wall, in the wan light of a London dawn and the pale unreal gleam of the still lighted lamps upon the bridge, cowers a girl whose face is almost hidden by her dishevelled golden hair and her shielding hands; and in front of her stands a countryman, of a somewhat too idealised type it may be to impress with unmistakable reality, but still not *unreal*, who clasps one of her arms in his hand and stoops to lift her from the weary misery of her degradation. He has come in from the sweet-smelling country, with the fragrant hay and the roses and honeysuckles in the hedges vying with each other for predominance, where all was pure and still, life being yet present in the innumerable larks in full song and in the linnets and chaffinches in the beech and ash trees by the white roadside, and the smoke from an early cottar's fire rising up in curling blue films above the distant elms surrounding some farm-house; and having at last entered the town, with his cart containing the calf he has brought for the

market, he has crossed the Thames by one of its numerous bridges and is arrested in his progress by the sight of the unfortunate girl crouching before him. He has not yet seen her face, but she has recognised in him the man who loved her in what seems to her long ago, and to whom she was betrothed ; but the sight of her not only touches the manly pity and chivalry of his nature but also strikes a chord of bitter but forgiving memory in his heart when he thinks of one young and beautiful like this poor girl, of whose fate he is unaware. Persistent in his brotherly kindness, he endeavours to raise the girl from her crouching position, and at last with a despairing look she returns his gaze, and in a moment the world seems dark to him again, darker even than on that day when he first learned that his betrothed had been unfaithful to him and had fled with her betrayer. The sestet of the sonnet tells us nothing further than that upon both hearts flashed the sudden and bitter memory of those gloaming hours when "under one mantle sheltered 'neath the hedge" they pled to each other their mutual troth ; that he in the agonising moment of recognition only knows he holds her again, but alas, "what part can life now take?"—while she in her misery can only with inaudible lips sob out, "Leave me—I do not know you!"

As will be recognised at once, the subject is a highly dramatic one, and it must be admitted that the artist has succeeded in giving it a dramatic representation, although the moment he has chosen for illustration is not that of recognition on the man's part, but where he stoops in pity over the golden-haired Magdalene. The painting of the picture as far as it is finished is very thorough, especially notable being the calf in the rough



country cart, the attitude of the cowering girl against the ivy-covered brick wall, and the pale flaming of the gas jets on the bridge against the cold wan blue light of advancing dawn : indeed, these gas gleams turning pale "in London's smokeless resurrection light" are amongst the best technical work of the artist, recalling a parallel passage in *Jenny*, where a natural truth is happily expressed :—

" Glooms begin

To shiver off as lights creep in  
Past the gauze curtains half drawn-to,  
And the lamp's doubled shade grows blue."

It is greatly to be regretted that this work is still unfinished, as a short period devoted to it entirely would have accomplished all that was necessary ; but this was not to be, for in a quiet churchyard near the sea rest the fertile hand and mind of him who has so enriched and ennobled English art as well as English literature.

With the picture of *Found* and the year 1882 ends this record, not indeed quite exhaustive, but as complete as is practicable so soon after the artist's death, and under the circumstances of the wide and frequently unrecorded distribution of the pictures, drawings, and designs. If the amount of imaginative conceptions and the general technical mastership have been rendered realisable to the reader unacquainted with the work of the great artist whose death we have all so recently deplored, one of the main objects of this narration will have been accomplished ; and it may be that it may help towards the clearing away of false impressions in the minds of some, towards enlarging and increasing the sympathetic admiration of others, and serving

collectors and those interested in art as the substantial basis of a possibly more complete and exact record. One can infer and gather much from a literary record, but one cannot judge from such alone ; but I am certain that the majority of those who have read the foregoing pages, and are at the same time in at least some measure acquainted with the artist's work, will not hesitate in believing one of the greatest names in the history of English art to be that of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

*(At the end of this volume will be found a Supplementary List giving as accurately and exhaustively as I have found practicable the dates of execution, subjects, mediums, states, and present owners of everything mentioned in the foregoing record, with any others which for various reasons I may not have been able to specify. No trouble has been spared to make it as reliable and complete as lay in my power, with the assistance of many concerned, to accomplish.)*

## ADDENDA TO CHAPTER III.

AMONGST those designs and pictures which I have for different reasons been unable to specify in the foregoing chapter are the following, some of whose dates are still conjectural. I may as well state here that if any difference be anywhere observable between the text and the Supplementary List the latter is to be taken as the correct information, it having undergone the closest revision down to the final proof. Amongst other designs executed for glass should have been mentioned that entitled *King René's Honeymoon*, which is in Mr. Birket Foster's residence in Surrey; and amongst panel paintings one in a large cabinet belonging to Mr. J. P. Seddon, representing a lady in blue playing an organ and a youth clothed in red leaning thereover, probably a *St. Cecily* design. Amongst unfulfilled early designs for pictures should have been mentioned one of *Fra Angelico painting* and one of *Giorgione painting*, both belonging to Mr. Madox Brown, and an interesting study in pencil founded on the story of *Dorothy and Theophilus*, in connection with which readers of Mr. Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* will recollect an enlargement of the theme in verse. Mr. J. P. Seddon has also several other pencil sketches and studies, but the latter are too incomplete to specify. In 1853 Rossetti executed a very fine pencil head of his father, exactly a year before the latter's death, and on this drawing a wood-engraving, which appeared in a biographical series of eminent Italians published at Turin, has been founded, but in a most unsatisfactory manner, giving no idea of the delicacy and beauty as well as the detail of the original. Mr. J. Mitchell has a highly-finished water-colour painted about 1863, regarding which the artist wrote:—"The drawing of *Brimfull* had its origin merely from my seeing a lady stoop to sip from a very full wine-glass before lifting it to her lips. The reflection in the glass is intended for that of a gentleman dining with her, who would be seated on the front side of the table

unseen in the picture"—particulars of course only interesting from a technical point of view. Amongst a number of crayon studies belonging to Mr. F. R. Leyland, unmentioned in the text, are specially notable a *Venus Verticordia*, the study for the picture of 1868, belonging to Mr. Graham, interesting from the background arrangement, which in this study consists of trellis-work with roses intertwined ; a *Bless'd Damsel*, a study for his own picture of that name but not so spiritual in expression, and a *Magdalene*, fine indeed, but in no way equal to that of 1876. In Mr. Ionides' possession there is a picture in tinted crayons called *The Siren*, a study indeed for the *Sea-Spell*, but differing from the completed picture to such an extent that it could be considered separately were the necessary space at my disposal ; but I may mention that its imaginative charm is more remarkable than its drawing. From the many interesting studies and designs left by the artist and as yet undisposed of, I can only now select the most interesting design called *Orpheus and Eurydice* (1868) ; the *Ricorditi di mè che sou la Pia* (1866), a most beautiful crayon picture, and not a design for that called *La Pia*, as the title would suggest, or at any rate the treatment is wholly different ; and the splendid *Desdemona's Death-Song*, of which the artist left so many states, and which he earnestly desired to carry out on canvas, but as it is it must rank in the first class of Rossetti's single-figure compositions. I have also forgotten to mention the large and important design in oil monochrome, *The Bout of Love*. But owing to late information frequently reaching me at a great distance from the writer's residence, I am still unable to include in this Supplementary Note such exhaustive specification as will be found in the catalogue at the end of this volume, which has been printed at the latest period practicable in order to embrace, if possible, all the artist's more or less finished designs and compositions.

## CHAPTER IV.

### PROSE WRITINGS—TRANSLATIONS—DANTE AND THE EARLY ITALIAN POETS.

THOSE familiar with the writings of the largest and noblest minded philosopher of our age may recollect a passage in the essay on *The Poet*, wherein the author, Ralph Waldo Emerson, rightly remarks, "It is not metres, but a metre-making arrangement that makes a poem ; a thought so passionate and alive, that, like the spirit of a plant or an animal, it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing." This sentence, or the same thought as therein expressed, must have occurred to every sympathetic reader of, amongst others, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Thomas Browne, Jeremy Taylor, Milton, De Quincey, Walter Savage Landor, and Ruskin ; for here and there in the works of each of these great prose writers there are "thoughts so passionate and alive," that the architecture in which they are shrouded is of necessity not prose but poetry, albeit rhyme and metre are absent. Leaving aside the controversy as to whether prose writing can in justifiable sense of the word be called poetry, it will be generally admitted that in some instances the poetic emotion seems of necessity to choose prose as its vehicle, and in the result becomes unanswerable proof of the fittingness of the choice. The borderland is indeed at times very

narrow ; and the following passages from Wordsworth's *Excursion* will show how an artificial metrical arrangement almost alone determines whether emotional diction shall be called poetry or prose, both being written exactly as they stand in the poem.

*I have seen a curious child, who dwelt upon a tract of inland ground, applying to his ear the convolutions of a smooth-lipped shell ; to which, in silence hushed, his very soul listened intensely ; and his countenance soon brightened with joy ; for from within were heard murmurings wherein the monitor expressed mysterious union with its native sea. Even such a shell the universe itself is to the ear of Faith ; and there are times, I doubt not, when to you it doth impart authentic tidings of invisible things ; of ebb and flow, and ever-during power ; and central peace, subsisting at the heart of endless agitation.—(BOOK IV.)*<sup>1</sup>

*Say what meant the woes by Tantalus entailed upon his race, and the dark sorrows of the line of Thebes ? . . . Exchange the shepherd's frock of native gray for robes with regal purple tinged ; convert the crook into a sceptre ; give the pomp of circumstance ; and here the Tragic Muse shall find apt subjects for her highest art. Amid the groves, under the shadowy hills, the generations are prepared ; the pangs, the internal pangs, are ready ; the dread strife of poor humanity's afflicted will struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.—(BOOK VI.)*

Contrast these well-known and beautiful passages with the following, and it would be hard to say why the latter should not be termed poetry, not of course the poetry of rhyme and metre, but that which is

<sup>1</sup> See also Landon's well-known passage in *Gebir*, beginning—*But I have sinuous shells of pearly hue*—the artificial construction of which imperatively forbids unmetrical arrangement.

animated by "thoughts so passionate and alive" as to be far removed from ordinary prose.

*O eloquent, just, and mighty Death ! whom none could advise ; thou hast persuaded ; what none hath dared, thou hast done ; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised ; thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, HIC JACET!—(SIR WALTER RALEIGH, *Hist. of the World.*)*

*But the third sister [i.e. the third sister, or Madonna of Sorrow, "Mater Tenebrarum"], who is also the youngest—! Hush ! whisper whilst we talk of HER ! Her kingdom is not large, or else no flesh should live ; but within the kingdom all power is hers. Her head, turreted like that of Cybele, rises almost beyond the reach of sight. She droops not ; and her eyes, rising so high, MIGHT be hidden by distance. But, being what they are, they cannot be hidden ; through the treble veil of crape which she wears, the fierce light of a blazing misery, that rests not for matins or for vespers, for noon of day or noon of night, for ebbing or for flowing tide, may be read from the very ground. She is the defier of God. She is also the mother of lunacies and the suggestress of suicides.—(DE QUINCEY, *Suspiria.*)*

*Or those war clouds that gather on the horizon, dragon-crested, tongued with fire ;—how is their barbed strength bridled ? what bits are these they are champing with their vaporous lips ; flinging off flakes of black foam ? Leagued leviathans of the sea of Heaven, out of their nostrils goeth smoke, and their eyes are like the eyelids of the morning. The sword of him that layeth at them cannot hold the spear, the dart, nor the habergeon.*

*Where ride the captains of their armies ! Where are set the measures of their march ? Fierce murmurers, answering each other from morning until evening—what rebuke is this which has awed them into peace ? what hand has reined them back by the way by which they came ?—* (JOHN RUSKIN, *Cloud Beauty. Modern Painters.*)

*Hers [Lionardo da Vinci's La Gioconda] is the head upon which all "the ends of the world are come," and the eyelids are a little weary. . . . She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the Vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave ; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her ; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants ; and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary ; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes. . . .—*(WALTER PATER, *The Renaissance.*)

While these are unmistakably prose passages they are far from being what is termed prosaic, and they fulfil, there can hardly be a doubt, as well as artificially poetic expression could, the emotion at the time influencing the mind of each writer. If, then, the poetic prose writer be not the same as the poet, his work is at any rate sufficiently emotional to make it rank, even if on a different platform, with that of the latter ; and hence, after all, the saying that such and such a work is a prose poem is not without justification. These remarks have been called forth by statements I have seen several times since the death of Dante Rossetti referring to his "prose poem *Hand and Soul*," by the same author's great admiration of poetic prose as a vehicle of intellectual emotion, and by remarks I recall



made by him as to the limitations of the two methods of expression. But to speak of Rossetti as a prose poet, as we have again and again ground for doing of Ruskin, for instance, is a mistake. In a sense, the "story" called *Hand and Soul* may be called a prose poem, the greater part of it consisting of exquisitely-balanced phrasing permeated by strong poetic emotion; yet it is not a prose poem in the sense, for example, that De Quincey's *Three Sisters of Sorrow* may be so called, lacking the sustained white-heat lyricism of the latter. It has indeed a central thought "so passionate and alive" that it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing, yet, while it attains the summit of perfect prose, it does not overstep the narrow border line and become, as Mr. Masson said in speaking of a portion of the *Suspiria*, a lyrical prose phantasy. It is poetic prose; poetic emotion (imaginative meditation) expressed in rhythmical but not lyrical cadence, and without rhyme and metre. It is more a beautiful allegory in exquisite prose than a prose poem. With the exception of *Hand and Soul*, and an unfinished narrative of spiritual experience, Rossetti wrote nothing else that can be strictly defined as poetic prose; finely balanced and rhythmical prose he did, indeed, invariably commit to paper. His original prose writings, however, are so very slight in amount that it will not be necessary to dwell at any length upon them. Indeed, the bulk of his non-poetic literary work is mainly comprised in his voluminous correspondence; otherwise, in addition to *Hand and Soul* and the unfinished "romance" called *St. Agnes of Intercession*, shown only to a very few friends, his original prose writings are to be found in the introduction to *Dante*

and *His Circle* (28 pp.) and preface; some material appearing in the late Mr. Gilchrist's valuable *Life of William Blake*, and in Mr. A. H. Palmer's most interesting *Biography of Samuel Palmer*; in one or two published letters and unpublished translations from the French; the appreciative and suggestive essay on Maclise written early in 1871, and the two critiques of Dr. Gordon Hake's poems; and finally, the important and beautiful rendering into sympathetic English of the *Vita Nuova*. His interest in Blake was from the first very great, and whatever he wrote with reference to the strange mystic artist-poet was with the highest appreciation and admiration; but, if I am not mistaken, it was not till his youth was past that he became acquainted with his work. So that the influence of the author of *Songs of Innocence* could not directly have manifested itself, as has been stated, in the early artistic and poetic work of Dante Rossetti. In the preface to the late edition of Blake's *Life*, Mrs. Gilchrist tells us that Rossetti assisted in the bringing-out of the volume to the extent of the choice and arrangement of a large collection of Blake's unpublished and hitherto almost equally inaccessible published writings, together with introductory remarks to each section. He was also the author of the supplementary chapter occupying pages 413-431 inclusive; Mr. Gilchrist having left a memorandum to the effect that such a chapter was intended, and having specified the list of topics to be handled. Elsewhere in the book the hand of Rossetti is also discernible. As specimens of his style in this book I give the following few extracts, illustrative also of his pictorially descriptive powers. "The tinting

of the *Song of Los* is not throughout of one order of value ; but no finer example of Blake's power in rendering poetic effects of landscape could be found than that almost miraculous expression of the glow and freedom of air in closing sunset, in a plate where a youth and maiden, lightly embraced, are racing along a saddened low-lit hill, against an open sky of blazing and changing wonder." Again, " See, for instance, in plate 8, the deep, unfathomable, green sea churning a broken foam as white as milk against that sky which is all blue and gold and blood-veined heart of fire ; while from sea to sky one locked and motionless face gazes, as it might seem, for ever." In the following occur lines which will at once strike as familiar any one knowing well Mr. Rossetti's poems ; " or plate 12, which, like the other two (8 and 9), really embodies some of the wild ideas in *Urizen*, but might seem to be Aurora guiding the new-born day, as a child, through a soft-complexioned sky of fleeting rose and tingling gray, such as only dawn and dreams can show us." This at once recalls the poem called *Plighted Promise*, where these lines occur—

" In a soft-complexioned sky,  
Fleeting rose and kindling gray,  
Have you seen Aurora fly  
At the break of day."

Again, speaking of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Rossetti writes, " for pure delightfulness, intricate colour, and a kind of Shakespearian sympathy with all forms of life and growth, as in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, let the gazer, having this precious book once in his hands, linger long over plates 10, 16, 22, and 23. If they be for him, he will be joyful more and more the

longer he looks, and will gain back in that time some things as he first knew them, not encumbered behind the days of his life ; things too delicate for memory or years since forgotten ; the momentary sense of spring in winter sunshine, the long sunsets long ago, and falling fires on many distant hills." And lastly, the concluding sentence of the chapter and of vol. i. :—" Any who can here find anything to love will be the poet-painter's welcome guests, still such a feast is spread first of all for those who can know at a glance that it is theirs and was meant for them ; who can meet their host's eye with sympathy and recognition, even when he offers them the new strange fruits grown for himself in far off gardens where he has dwelt alone, or pours for them the wines which he has learned to love, in lands where they never travelled."

From the essay on Maclise's Portrait-Gallery the following brief extract relating to the finest of the series will be read with interest :—

" But one picture here stands out from the rest in mental power, and ranks Maclise as a great master of tragic satire. It is that which grimly shows us the senile torpor of Talleyrand, as he sits in after-dinner sleep between the spread board and the fireplace, surveyed from the mantel-shelf by the busts of all the sovereigns he had served. His elbows are on the chair-arms ; his hands hang ; his knees, fallen open, reveal the waste places of shrivelled age ; the book he read, as the lore he lived by, has dropped between his feet ; his chap-fallen mask is spread upward as the scalp rests on the cushioned chair-back ; the wick gutters in the wasting candle beside him ; and his last master claims him now. All he was is gone ; and water or fire for the world after him—what care had he ? The picture is more than a satire ; it might be called a diagram of damnation : a ghastly historical verdict which becomes the image of the man for ever."

Of the two critiques on the Poems of Dr. Gordon

Hake, the first appeared in *The Academy* for February 1, 1873. It occupies some five or six columns and is a good piece of critical writing, appreciative of the many undoubted excellences in *Madeline, with other Poems and Parables*, and at the same time discriminating as to the equally undoubted minor flaws in the same. The second critique, on Dr. Hake's second series, occupying with quotations six pages printed in small type, appeared in *The Fortnightly Review* for April 1873 and contains some very characteristic writing in addition to the critical excellence manifest in the earlier notice.

Sir Theodore Martin begins aright his introduction to his admirable translation of the "*Confessio Amantis*" of Dante by remarking that there is not in literature a more notable contribution to the personal history of a great man than the *Vita Nuova*; and perhaps no living Englishman is better qualified to speak on the subject than the well-known writer who so far back as 1845 published in *Tait's Magazine* some noteworthy translations from the poems interspersed throughout the *New Life*, and who early in 1861 gave to many willing readers the first complete translation of the whole work that had been made. No other writer of English parentage had until then felt specially fitted or called upon to undertake the work, but one who was at once Italian by blood and English through habitude had been at work for a considerable time previous to 1861 on what he felt to be a labour specially suited to him, this second writer being, of course, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. It was only a few months, then, after the publication of Sir Theodore Martin's scholarly translation that there also appeared *The Early*

*Italian Poets* of Rossetti, a contribution the value of which can perhaps be hardly justly gauged without some knowledge of the immense difficulties in the way, and which the first-named author acknowledged in the introduction to his second edition "as in all respects worthy of his (Rossetti's) great reputation." It would be difficult to imagine any more congenial translatative work for a man like Rossetti than that afforded by the pathetic record of the great Florentine's ideal boyhood, and certainly no one who could better catch and adequately render again (in his own words) the strain that is "like the first falling murmur which reaches the ear in some remote meadow, and prepares us to look upon the sea." The introduction to *Dante and his Circle* (to the metrical portion of which the translation of the *Vita Nuova* is prefixed) is a good piece of critical writing, and, dealing with facts and dates, yet made generally interesting; replete, moreover, with a rich store of learning and patient study. After what the reader feels to be an unnecessary apology for its length, there is an explanation welcome to most regarding the advisability of not hampering the text with endless notes, where the student "struggles through a few lines at the top of the page only to stick fast at the bottom in a slough of verbal analysis;" concluding with the apt remark, "the glare of too many tapers is apt to render the altar-picture confused and inharmonious, even when their smoke does not obscure or deface it." Without meaning any undue disparagement to Sir Theodore Martin's accurate and graceful translation, that of Rossetti is undeniably more fascinating in the metrical portions, while the prose, equal in literality, more sympathetically resembles the mediæval style of

the original. Parallel passages taken at random will best exemplify this :—

## D. G. ROSSETTI.

Also, after I had recovered from my sickness, I bethought me to write these things in rhyme ; deeming it a lovely thing to be known. Whereof I wrote this poem :—

A very pitiful lady, very young,  
Exceeding rich in human sympathies,  
Stood by, what time I clamoured up-  
on Death ;  
And at the wild words wandering on  
my tongue  
And at the piteous look within mine  
eyes  
She was affrighted, that sobs choked  
her breath.

## SIR THEODORE MARTIN.

When afterwards I recovered from this sickness, I resolved to embody this incident in verse, forasmuch as it seemed to me that it would be a thing delectable to hear ; and so I composed the following canzone :—

A lady fair, compassionate and  
young,  
With all good graces bounteously  
adorned,  
Stood by, where, calling oft on  
Death, I lay ;  
When she beheld my face with an-  
guish wrung,  
And heard the wandering words  
wherein I mourned,  
She wept aloud, so sore was her  
dismay.

For those who have not read the *Vita Nuova* either in Rossetti's or in any other version the following quotations may be of interest and also inducement to the perusal of one of the world's most interesting books. The first is from the translator's introduction to *Dante and his Circle*, and the second is from *The New Life* itself, describing Dante's vision of the death of Beatrice, —the subject, it will be remembered, of one of the artist's greatest pictures.

*It may be noted here, however, how necessary a knowledge of the Vita Nuova is to the full comprehension of the part borne by Beatrice in the Commedia. Moreover, it is only from the perusal of its earliest and then undivulged self-communings that we can divine the whole bitterness of wrong to such a soul as Dante's, its poignant sense of abandonment, or its deep and jealous refuge in*

*memory. Above all, it is here that we find the first manifestations of that wisdom of obedience, that natural breath of duty, which afterwards, in the Commedia, lifted up a mighty voice for warning and testimony. Throughout the Vita Nuova there is a strain like the first falling murmur which reaches the ear in some remote meadow, and prepares us to look upon the sea.*

*A few days after this [the death of Falco Portinari, father of Beatrice], my body became afflicted with a painful infirmity, whereby I suffered bitter anguish for many days, which at last brought me unto such weakness that I could no longer move. And I remember that on the ninth day, being overcome with intolerable pain, a thought came into my mind concerning my lady: but when it had a little nourished this thought, my mind returned to its brooding over mine enfeebled body. And then perceiving how frail a thing life is, even though health keep with it, the matter seemed so pitiful that I could not choose but weep; and weeping I said within myself: "Certainly it must some time come to pass that the very gentle Beatrice will die." Then, feeling bewildered, I closed mine eyes; and my brain began to be in travail as the brain of one frantic, and to have such imaginations as here follow.*

*And at the first, it seemed to me that I saw certain faces of women with their hair loosened, which called out to me, "Thou shalt surely die;" after the which, other terrible and unknown appearances said unto me, "Thou art dead." At length, as my phantasy held on in its wanderings, I came to be I knew not where, and to behold a throng of dishevelled ladies wonderfully sad, who kept going hither and thither weeping. Then the sun went*



out, so that the stars showed themselves, and they were of such a colour that I knew they must be weeping : and it seemed to me that the birds fell dead out of the sky, and that there were great earthquakes. With that, while I wondered in my trance, and was filled with a grievous fear, I conceived that a certain friend came unto me and said : " Hast thou not heard ? She that was thine excellent lady hath been taken out of life." Then I began to weep very piteously ; and not only in mine imagination, but with mine eyes, which were wet with tears. And I seemed to look towards Heaven, and to behold a multitude of angels who were returning upwards, having before them an exceedingly white cloud ; and these angels were singing together gloriously, and the words of their song were these : " Osanna in excelsis," and there was no more that I heard. Then my heart that was so full of love said unto me : " It is true that our lady lieth dead ;" and it seemed to me that I went to look upon the body wherein that blessed and most noble spirit had had its abiding-place. And so strong was this idle imagining, that it made me to behold my lady in death ; whose head certain ladies seemed to be covering with a white veil ; and who was so humble of her aspect that it was as though she had said : " I have attained to look on the beginning of peace." And therewithal I came unto such humility by the sight of her, that I cried out upon death, saying : " Now come unto me, and be not bitter against me any longer : surely, there where thou hast been, thou hast learned gentleness. Wherefore come now unto me who do greatly desire thee : seest thou not that I wear thy colour already ?" And when I had seen all those offices performed that are fitting to be done unto the dead, it seemed to me that I went back unto mine own chamber,

and looked up towards Heaven. And so strong was my phantasy, that I wept again in very truth, and said with my true voice: "O excellent soul! how blessed is he that now looketh upon thee!"

*Hand and Soul* was first published in *The Germ*, many years later in pamphlet form for private circulation,—of the latter very few were printed, and copies accordingly are very scarce,—and finally, with some alterations in *The Fortnightly Review*. In the copy I possess there is also a very pregnant marginal alteration and addition on page 16, which will be specified further on.<sup>1</sup> This apparent narrative and real allegory has misled many who read it in *The Germ* or *The Fortnightly Review*, not only as to the author's having been in Italy but also as to the existence of such a painter as Chiaro dell' Erma; and since the author's death this imaginative narrative has been the basis of all the assurances as to the truth of the former. Neither the statement as to being in Florence in the spring of 1847, nor the full account of the *Schizzo d'autore incerto* in the Pitti Gallery, with the very deceptive supplementary footnote, nor the Dresden triptych and two cruciform pictures, nor the zealous and enthusiastic connoisseur Dr. Aemmster himself, have any foundation in fact; but it must be confessed the narration of these facts is so circumstantial that it is not to be wondered at when those who have read *Hand and Soul* believed the author to have really visited Italy after all, and to strongly desire to see the mythical *Figura mistica di Chiaro dell' Erma* under the mythical number 161 in the mythical *Sala Sessagona* of the

<sup>1</sup> An alteration from *The Germ* copy, but existent in *The Fortnightly Review* (1870).

Pitti Gallery. Originally there was no idea in the author's mind of deception, the imaginary facts having been added simply to enhance the reality of the whole, as in a poem or in fiction one takes a certain scene and adds to it other details thoroughly fittingly but still not to be found therein; but as time went on and he saw the narrative was now and then taken *au sérieux* Rossetti frequently to his own amusement allowed any inferences to be drawn without contradiction from himself. I remember his greatly enjoying the somewhat too-willing readiness of a lady determined to gratify such a well-known artist, whom she had met for the first time at a friend's house. Having first mentioned how she had read in *The Fortnightly Review* his "intensely interesting account of that strange Italian painter Chiaro dell' Erma," she added that she had lately been in Florence and distinctly remembered having seen the picture in question and that it was worthy of all that he (Rossetti) had written regarding it. The author of *Hand and Soul* expressed his pleasure thereat, but his restrained amusement nearly betrayed itself when she further stated that she agreed with him entirely in considering the *Figura Mistica* more beautiful and affecting than the cruciform pictures and triptych at Dresden, despite these being unmistakably the work of a master, but that it was unfortunate they were placed in such a bad light! Prefatory to the narrative of *Hand and Soul* are some applicable lines from Bonaggiunta Urbiciani, a poet who dwelt in Lucca about 1250 :—

"Rivolsimi in quel lato  
Là onde venla la voce,  
E parvemi una luce

Che lucea quanto stella :  
La mia mente era quella."<sup>1</sup>

The actual account of Chiaro di Messer Bello dell' Erma is preceded by a few sentences on the very early painters, those "who feared God and loved the art," in Lucca, Pisa, and Arezzo, before any knowledge of painting was brought to Florence. "The pre-eminence to which Cimabue was raised at once by his contemporaries, and which he still retains to a wide extent even in the modern mind, is to be accounted for, partly by the circumstances under which he arose, and partly by that extraordinary *purpose of fortune* born with the lives of some few, and through which it is not a little thing for any who went before, if they are even remembered as the shadows of the coming of such an one, and the voices which prepared his way in the wilderness. It is thus, almost exclusively, that the painters of whom I speak are now known. They have left little, and but little heed is taken of that which men hold to have been surpassed; it is gone like time gone,—a track of dust and dead leaves that merely led to the fountain." However, as the writer points out, of late years some signs of a better understanding have become manifest, especially in one case, where the "eloquent pamphlet of Dr. Aemmster has at length succeeded in attracting the students." Then the "narrative," occupying about fourteen pages, is proceeded with. Chiaro dell' Erma is a young man of honourable lineage in Arezzo, animated by the instinctively

<sup>1</sup> I turned me to the side  
Whence came the voice,  
And there appeared to me a light  
That shone bright as a star :  
My own mind it was.

creative, artistic spirit, though almost for himself had he conceived art, endeavouring "from early boyhood towards the imitation of any objects offered in nature." This passionate desire of expression gained upon him with his growth, and to such an extent that he grew more in susceptibility than in strength, so that the unpaintable glory of sunsets and the beauty of living form in the figures of "stately persons" made him feel faint with the knowledge of their perfectness and his own inevitable deficiency in translation, besides he suffered, as only such temperaments can suffer, from the very excellence of their loveliness. In his nineteenth year he hears for the first time of "the famous Giunta Pisano," and determines to become his pupil, at once full of admiration of what he has heard of the painter, and envious of what had been given to the master in such degree. In due time he arrives in Pisa, and "unwilling that any other thing than the desire he had for knowledge should be his plea with the great painter," he presented himself before the master clothed in humble apparel and with the general aspect of a poor student; but, after having been received with courtesy and consideration, when admitted to the studio a revulsion of feeling comes upon him, the cause of this being a recognition of the fact that with all his inexperience he has learned more from nature in his own Arezzo than Giunta can teach him. "The forms he saw there were lifeless and incomplete; and a sudden exultation possessed him as he said within himself, 'I am the master of this man.' The blood came at first into his face, but the next moment he was quite pale and fell to trembling. He was able, however, to conceal his emotion; speaking very little

to Giunta, but when he took his leave thanking him respectfully." Chiaro's first resolve was one befitting such a youth, the determination to select some one of his conceptions and thoroughly work it out, so that his name might be accepted among men and honour done to the art he worshipped. But two things militated against this determination, the first being the lesson he had learned by the fame of Giunta, "of how small a greatness might win fame, and how little there was to strive against," and the second being his youth with its natural susceptibility to pleasure in whatever shape, for in Pisa, which was much larger and more luxurious than Arezzo, there were beautiful pleasure gardens free to all, where in the delicious evening sweet strains of music thrilled upon the warm air and where after day-fall and ere moonrise beautiful women passed to and fro. Chiaro, "despite of the burthen of study, was well-favoured and very manly in his walking," and moreover there was upon his face a glory "as upon the face of one who feels a light round his hair," so that it is not to be wondered at that he was loved by women, and that the young passionate-natured artist should put away from himself his thought and study and claim "his share of the inheritance of those years in which his youth was cast." Thus for a time his life was given up to enjoyment and the alluring enticements that beset youth as a tropic flower is surrounded by countless lovely butterflies and gorgeous moths, but deep in his heart there lay a protest against forsaken purpose and a dormant discontent. Out of the too pleasant spiritual sloth in which he dwells he is at last startled, partly by that form of subtle jealousy peculiar to the artistic temperament, and partly by an

awakened conscience; for one evening, "being in a certain company of ladies, a gentleman that was there with him began to speak of the paintings of a youth named Bonaventura, which he had seen in Lucca; adding that Giunta Pisano might now look for a rival. When Chiaro heard this, the lamps shook before him and the music beat in his ears. He rose up, alleging a sudden sickness, and went out of that house with his teeth set. And, being again within his room, he wrote up over the door the name of Bonaventura, that it might stop him when he would go out." From this time forth Chiaro resisted all temptations and worked day and night almost at his art, only at times walking abroad in the most solitary places he could find, so rapt indeed in the thoughts and desires of the day which held him in fever, that he hardly felt the ground under him. The dwelling and working-place he had chosen was away from the publicity of the streets and looked out upon the gardens adjoining the Church of San Petronio, and here and at this period, the author tells us, were in all probability painted the Dresden pictures, and the one of inferior merit now at Munich. A graphic portrait of the young painter at this period of earnest work and strange daring conceptions is given in the words, "For the most part he was calm and regular in his manner of study, though often he would remain at work through the whole of a day, not resting once so long as the light lasted; flushed, and with the hair from his face. Or, at times, when he could not paint, he would sit for hours in thought of all the greatness the world had known from of old." Three years elapse, and Chiaro's patient endeavour brings him success and fame, and as his name becomes more and

more honoured throughout Tuscany his work becomes familiar in many a church and even in the Duomo itself. These three years have brought him the fame that of all things he most desired, but for this very reason they have not brought him content, and the old familiar weight of painful desire is still at his heart, and the true spiritual yearning that can be met only by the soul's acknowledgment, and not by the mere applause of men. And now there came upon him that time of perplexity and self-questioning and longing for what has passed away that all emotional natures bitterly experience at least once in their lives. In all that he hath done in these three years, and to a great extent in the boyish years preceding them, a feeling of worship and service had ever been present in his work, and again and again would come to him a vision of that day when "his mystical lady (now hardly in her ninth year, but whose smile at meeting had already lighted on his soul),<sup>1</sup> even she, his own gracious Italian art, should pass through the sun that never sets, into the shadow of the tree of life, and be seen of God and found good. . . . This thing he had seen with the eyes of his spirit; and in this thing had trusted, believing that it would surely come to pass." But this worship and service was not always wholly from the heart but often a kind of peace-offering "that he made to God and to his own soul for the eager selfishness of his aim." So he has become at last aware, even in the full tide of his successful pursuit of art, that he has misinterpreted the craving of his own spirit, and

<sup>1</sup> This was written in 1849-50, and it shows an intimate acquaintance at that date with the *Vita Nuova*, wherein Dante uses almost similar terms speaking of his first sight of Beatrice, with the same mention of the mystic figure "nine."



that the worship he has striven to embody in his art is often of the earth, earthy, and not of heaven; and now, alas! when he would willingly fall back on devotion he finds to his grief "that much of that reverence he had mistaken for faith had been no more than the worship of beauty." Recognising these issues of his years he knows that his life and will are yet before him, and he says unto himself that henceforth he will have a definite aim in life; an aim that shall exist even if faith should not be stable or the will sympathetic, whose sole end shall be "the presentment of some moral greatness that should influence the beholder." But any such resolution, if against natural tendencies, is apt to bring its own Nemesis; for the artist or poet who says I *will* do this instead of I *must* do this, sins against his nature, and the expiation is invariably sure. So that when Chiaro multiplies abstractions, forgetting the beauty and passion of the world, his pictures, when passing through towns and villages to their destination, are no longer delayed by the eager and admiring inhabitants, but are viewed only with interest by coldly critical eyes; for no longer now does he touch the hearts and imaginations of the people, his pictures being without emotion and laboriously worked out only in handicraft, as he did of old with his beautiful Holy Children, and Madonnas, and wonderful Saints, "wrought for the sake of the life he saw in the faces that he loved." And now no more does he work in that fever of body and mind which characterised him during the period that elapsed after the memorable night when he returned to his dwelling and wrote above the door of his room the name of Bonaventura; but he is as calm and pale as

his works are cold and unemphatic, the latter "bearing marked out upon them the measure of that boundary to which they were made to conform." He now said to himself that peace was at last his possession, but his heart denied it, and in his inmost life he felt the same weight that had been with him from the first; yet he would not admit this, but worked the harder so to drive out the necessity for thinking on that which he was afraid to know.

At last occasion happened for a great feast to be given in Pisa, and the Church and all the city guilds and companies united to make it a time of rejoicing and merry-making, "and there were scarcely any that stayed in the houses, except ladies who lay or sat along their balconies between open windows which let the breeze beat through the rooms and over the spread tables from end to end. And the golden cloths that their arms lay upon drew all eyes upward to see their beauty; and the day was long; and every hour of the day was bright with the sun." Chiaro does not join the rejoicings, but he cannot work, for his model could not resist the pleasant sights, and so came not at all to the studio of his employer; and as he cannot work neither can he sit in idleness, as then his "stealthy thoughts would begin to beat round and round him, seeking a point for attack." He rises therefore from before his easel and seats himself at a window where he can look forth upon the people coming and going through the porch of the Church of San Petronio, and in his ears still echo as they have done all morning the many diverse sounds from the thronged street, now of festal music from the organ-choirs, now processions with priests and acolytes

chanting hymns and prayers of peace and praise, and now the sudden clamour of quick voices and clashing of steel as rival factions meet and draw upon each other until one side gives way. Shortly ere noon the people began to come forth from San Petronio, passing out by the porch wherein were some tall narrow pictures by Chiaro painted that year for the Church. The author of *Hand and Soul* here gives a most striking picture of San Petronio filled with the chiefs and adherents of the two greatest houses of the feud in Pisa, met for once under one building: of how the Gherghiotti left first but halted on the threshold, there forming in ranks along either side so that their ancestral enemies, the Marotoli, had to walk forth between. The Gherghiotti stood with their backs against the narrow frescoes of Chiaro, which presented a moral allegory of Peace, and, as their feudal foes came forth, "shrilled and threw up their wrists scornfully, as who flies a falcon; for that was the crest of their house;" while the Marotoli laid back their hoods, showing the badge of their house upon their close skull-caps, and gazed round them defiantly. Still an encounter might have been prevented had it not been for the insult a certain Golzo Ninuccio, the youngest noble of the Gherghiotti faction, gave to the Marotoli. This young man, on account of his debased life surnamed by the people Gologhiotta, seeing that no man on either side jostled another, drew from his foot the long silver shoe he wore, and, while striking the dust out of it upon the cloak of some adherent of the Marotoli, tauntingly asked him, "How far the tides rose at Viderza." The bitterness in this taunt lay in the fact that at that place some three months previous

the Gherghiotti had driven the defeated Marotoli to the sands, the combat continuing while the tide rose and the sea came in, whereby many were drowned. No sooner is the taunt given than the whole archway becomes "dazzling with the light of confused swords;" and in a moment the rival factions are oblivious to everything but hate and death, till on a sudden long streams of blood pour down the frescoes of Peace.<sup>1</sup> At last the combatants leave the porch for the open and the fight spreads from one end of the city to the other, and tumult and bloodshed are the issues of the festal rejoicings. But to Chiaro comes neither sympathy with Gherghiotti or Marotoli nor the excitement of witnessing such a terrible scene, but instead a deep and bitter grief takes possession of him as he sits with his face in his open hands. And his unshapen thoughts tell him that first Fame failed him, and then Faith, and now passes from him that hope in his generation he had cherished, for even in that sacred place wherein with his art he had written Peace, even there had been cruel and unnecessary slaughter. His blood is on fire and the long-trammelled passion of his nature breaks out in wild self-accusation, till the fever encroaches and he would fain rise but finds he cannot; but suddenly he is filled with indefinite awe, and through the painful silence he becomes conscious that he is not alone though the doors have opened to no visitor. Almost as much knowing it spiritually as seeing it materially, he becomes aware of a woman with joined hands and with a face solemnly beautiful,

<sup>1</sup> This scene of the deadly meeting of factions at feud with one another is evidently drawn from a passage in Giovanni Villani's *History of Florence*, which Rossetti himself gives a rendering of at p. 8, *Introd. to Part I. of Dante and His Circle*.

in which the gaze is austere indeed but the mouth supreme in gentleness, clad to the hands and feet in soft green and gray raiment; but this fair presence he never mistook for any woman such as he had known in Pisa, for in looking at her "it seemed that the first thoughts he had ever known were given him as at first from her eyes; and he knew her hair to be the golden veil through which he beheld his dreams." Although in such a separate personality, he feels her to be as much with him as his breath, and when she speaks it is by no visible motion of her lips but in some strange way that is yet not unfamiliar, so that he is "like one who, scaling a great steepness, hears his own voice echoed in some place much higher than he can see, and the name of which is not known to him." And her speech that is with him bears unto him the message, "I am an image, Chiaro, of thine own soul within thee. See me, and know me as I am;" and thereafter she tells him that inasmuch as he has not laid his life unto riches, though fame and faith had both proved Dead Sea apples unto him, it is thus that it is not too late for her to come into his knowledge. Then she reminds him that fame sufficed him not for the very reason that he sought fame, while it ought to have been the approval of his inmost conscience he looked for; and when she has thus spoken and further, Chiaro sinks upon his knees, not indeed to her, for the speech seemed as much from within as from without,—and all around him "the air brooded in sunshine, and though the turmoil was great outside, the air within was at peace."

To this point in *Hand and Soul* I have kept close to the narrative itself and have dealt with it *in extenso*,

both because of its beauty as a creation by the subject of this record and because of its thorough individuality; but I will now quote at some length the important passages that follow, valuable not only for their inherent significance but also because of their specially affecting the personality of Rossetti himself. In fact, these passages may be regarded as directly personal utterances applicable to himself as an artist, and this I know from his own lips as well as from every natural evidence; so that I have no hesitation in transcribing what amounts to an artistic *confessio fidei*, to Rossetti's own convictions as to how an artist should work with both "hand and soul" towards the accomplishment of every conception. Their applicability to all imaginatively and emotionally creative work will be manifest to many, and the central idea is certainly that which it would be well if most persons besides those who "create" would take to heart—that true life is the truest worship and truest praise, "for with God is no lust of godhead."<sup>1</sup>

*But when he looked in her eyes, he wept. And she came to him, and cast her hair over him, and took her hands about his forehead, and spoke again:—*

*"Thou hast said that faith failed thee. This cannot be. Either thou hadst it not, or thou hast it. But who bade thee strike the point betwixt love and faith? Wouldst thou sift the warm breeze from the sun that quickens it? Who bade thee turn upon God and say:*

<sup>1</sup> This is the phrase I referred to a few pages back as being interpolated in autograph on the copy of *Hand and Soul* I possess. The beauty of the idea and its essential truth can hardly fail to at once come home to the reader; and Rossetti considered this phrase, though not so worded in the original in *The Germ*, to be to *Hand and Soul* what the heart is to the body.

*'Behold, my offering is of earth, and not worthy: thy fire comes not upon it: therefore, though I slay not my brother whom thou acceptest, I will depart before Thou smite me.'* Why shouldst thou rise up and tell God *He* is not content? Had *He*, of *His* warrant, certified so to thee? Be not nice to seek out division; but possess thy love in sufficiency: assuredly this is faith, for the heart must believe first. What *He* hath set in thine heart to do, that do thou; and even though thou do it without thought of *Him*, it shall be well done; it is this sacrifice that *He* asketh of thee, and *His* flame is upon it for a sign. Think not of *Him*; but of *His* love and thy love. For with God is no lust of godhead: *He* hath no hand to bow beneath, nor a foot, that thou shouldst kiss it."

And Chiaro held silence, and wept into her hair which covered his face: and the salt tears that he shed ran through her hair upon his lips; and he tasted the bitterness of shame.

Then the fair woman, that was his soul, spoke again to him, saying:—

"And for this thy last purpose, and for those unprofitable truths of thy teaching,—thine heart hath already put them away, and it needs not that I lay my bidding upon thee. How is it that thou, a man, wouldst say coldly to the mind what God hath said to the heart warmly? Thy will was honest and wholesome; but look well lest this also be folly—to say '*I, in doing this, do strengthen God among men.*' When at any time hath *He* cried unto thee, saying, '*My son, lend me thy shoulder, for I fall?*' Deemest thou that the men who enter God's temple in malice, to the provoking of blood, and neither for *His* love nor for *His* wrath, will abate their purpose,—shall afterwards stand with thee in the porch, midway

*between Him and themselves, to give ear unto thy thin voice, which merely the fall of their visors can drown, and to see thy hands, stretched feebly, tremble among their swords? Give thou to God no more than He asketh of thee; but to man also, that which is man's. In all that thou doest, work from thine own heart, simply; for His heart is as thine, when thine is wise and humble; and He shall have understanding of thee. One drop of rain is as another, and the sun's prism in all: and shalt thou not be as he, whose lives are the breath of One? Only by making thyself His equal can He learn to hold communion with thee, and at last own thee above Him. Not till thou lean over the water shalt thou see thine image therein: stand erect, and it shall slope from thy feet and be lost. Know that there is but this means whereby thou mayest serve God with man:—Set thine hand and thy soul to serve man with God."*

*And when she that spoke had said these words within Chiaro's spirit, she left his side quietly, and stood up as he had first seen her: with her fingers laid together, and her eyes steadfast, and with the breadth of her long dress covering her feet on the floor. And, speaking again, she said—*

*"Chiaro, servant of God, take now thine art unto thee, and paint me thus, as I am, to know me: weak, as I am, and in the weeds of this time; only with eyes which seek out labour, and with a faith, not learned, yet jealous of prayer. Do this; so shall thy soul stand before thee always, and perplex thee no more."*

*And Chiaro did as she bade him. While he worked, his face grew solemn with knowledge: and before the shadows had turned, his work was done. Having finished, he lay back where he sat, and was asleep immediately:*



for the growth of that strong sunset was heavy about him, and he felt weak and haggard; like one just come out of a dusk, hollow country, bewildered with echoes, where he had lost himself, and who has not slept for many days and nights. And when she saw him lie back, the beautiful woman came to him, and sat at his head, gazing, and quieted his sleep with her voice.

Throughout all the day the tumult of the opponents and the cries of the dying had not ceased, but Chiaro heard nothing thereof; and while he slept, the day that was to have been a day of feasting and rejoicing came to an end in a solemn mass sung at midnight in every church in Pisa for the many dead who encumbered the streets. This painting, which, as mentioned above, is the picture of his soul as the spirit appeared to him in womanly guise, is that which the author of *Hand and Soul* declares therein to be No. 161 in the *Sala Sessagona* of the Pitti Gallery in Florence. After the narration of the vision of Chiaro is finished, the writer adds some supplementary pages, beginning with the statement that he was in the last-named city in the spring of 1847, and that he was much attracted by a small picture hung below a Raphael, but so hung evidently out of all chronology; the representation in the picture being simply that of a woman clad in a green and gray raiment of antique fashion, standing with earnest outlooking eyes and hands held lightly together. There was nothing on the picture to indicate its painter; in one corner of the canvas, however, being discoverable on close examination the date 1239, and the words *Manus Animam pinxit*. The following day Rossetti states having again visited the picture, but this time finds it surrounded by students, not, however, copying

it but the painting by Raphael beneath which it is hung. The students are chiefly Italian (and of the artistic powers of modern Italians Rossetti, it may be mentioned in passing, had anything but a high opinion), and they cannot understand the Englishman's evident interest in the *Schizzo d' autore incerto* which indeed they had not consciously noticed hitherto; and in reply one says to another a witticism that, with the rejoinder of a third, raises a general laugh. *Che so?* he says, looking the time at the picture, *roba mistica: 'st' Inglesi son matti sul misticismo: somiglia alle nebbie di là. Li fa pensare alla patria,*

*"e intenerisce il core  
Lo di ch' han detto ai dolci amici adio."*

*La notte, vuoi dire,* adds the third.

He who had quoted Dante turns to a French fellow-student with the remark, *Et toi donc?—que dis-tu de ce genre-là?* To which the latter replies, *Moi? Je dis, mon cher, que c'est une spécialité dont je me fiche pas mal. Je tiens que quand on ne comprend pas une chose, c'est qu'elle ne signifie rien.*

And *Hand and Soul* concludes with the words, "My reader thinks possibly that the French student was right."

A complete outline has thus been given of Rossetti's chief prose production, short as it is in length; a composition as thoroughly individual and on its own platform as beautiful as anything amongst his poems.

Regarding the late Samuel Palmer, many of whose poetic and beautiful transcripts from nature were lately exhibited in London, Rossetti wrote to Mr. L. R. Valpy, the esteemed acquaintance of both artists: "Such a

manifestation of spiritual force absolutely present, though not isolated as in Blake, has certainly never been united with native landscape power in the same degree as Palmer's works display; while, when his glorious colouring is abandoned for the practice of etching, the same exceptional unity of soul and sense appears again, with the same rare use of manipulative material. The possessors of his works have what *must* grow in influence, just as the possessors of Blake's creations are beginning to find; but with Palmer the progress must be more positive, and infinitely more rapid, since, while a specially select artist to the few, he has a realistic side on which he touches the many, more than Blake can ever do." As deeply as he did the genius, so did he admire the personality of Samuel Palmer, and, from what we can gather from Mr. A. H. Palmer's Biography, that personal admiration was deserved to the utmost.

Rossetti as a translator has now to be briefly considered, and no better prefatory remarks to translatative work in general can be found than in his own words, as such are to be found in his preface to *Dante and His Circle*. As therein stated, the cardinal principle to be kept in mind by every renderer of a poem from one language to another is—that a good poem shall not be turned into a bad one. "The only true motive for putting poetry into a fresh language must be to endow a fresh nation, as far as possible, with one or more possession of beauty. Poetry not being an exact science, literalness of rendering is altogether secondary to this chief law. I say *literalness*, not fidelity, which is by no means the same thing. When literalness can be combined with what is thus the primary condition of success, the translator is fortunate, and must strive his

utmost to unite them ; when such object can only be attained by paraphrase, that is his only path. . . . Often would he avail himself of any special grace of his own idiom and epoch, if only his will belonged to him ; often would some cadence serve him but for his author's structure—some structure but for his author's cadence ; often the beautiful turn of a stanza must be weakened to adopt some rhyme which will tally, and he sees the poet revelling in abundance of language where himself is scantily supplied. Now he would slight the matter for the music, and now the music for the matter ; but no, he must deal to each alike. Sometimes, too, a flaw in the work galls him, and he would fain remove it, doing for the poet that which his age denied him ; but no, it is not in the bond. His path is like that of Aladdin through the enchanted vaults : many are the precious fruits and flowers which he must pass by unheeded in search for the lamp alone ; happy if at last, when brought to light, it does not prove that his old lamp has been exchanged for a new one, glittering indeed to the eye, but scarcely of the same virtue nor with the same genius at its summons."

That to such an ideal translator Rossetti approaches closely, if he does not indeed fully attain the standard, is beyond question, and though his masterpiece in translation is in the original old French of Villon, beautiful in itself for all and in any time, yet his excellence in this branch of literature is more markedly proved in *Dante and His Circle*, and more especially in many of the more involved and otherwise difficult sonnets and canzonieri. Many of these, it is true, possess little interest for the general reader, and some of them are even devoid of any distinct poetic merit whatever ; yet

even with these drawbacks such possess a peculiar attraction of their own, with their quaint reflections of early Italian modes of thought and expression, civic customs, and individual habits of life :—for instance, the clever sonnets of Folgore da San Geminiano dealing with the days of the week and the months of the year as he would fain have them spent by his fellow scapegraces of Siena. Altogether a goodly number of vessels for the ocean of literature, some brave sloops and some only slight but buoyant shallops, so that the translator had no cause to minimise in his modesty the extent of his achievement by speaking of merely “launching afresh on high-seas busy with new traffic, the ships which have been long outstripped and the ensigns which are grown strange.”

I referred a sentence or two back to Rossetti’s masterpiece in translation, and this, one can have but little hesitation in declaring, is the well-known and exquisite rendering of François Villon’s *Ballad of Dead Ladies*, combining, as it does literality, as in—

“But where are the snows of yester-year”—  
*Où sont les neiges d’antan ?*

with such individual excellence of rendering as—

“Tell me now in what hidden way is  
Lady Flora the lovely Roman ?  
Where’s Hipparchia, and where is Thais,  
Neither of them the fairer woman ?  
Where is Echo, beheld of no man,  
Only heard on river and mere,—  
She whose beauty was more than human ? . . .  
But where are the snows of yester-year ?”

This famous ballad has been at least thrice well translated into our language, but while one of them certainly

excels in uniform literality, that of Rossetti undoubtedly ranks first. He had special faculties for rendering into English verse the quaint metres and modes of thought and sentiment of early literatures, whether French or Italian, and, if such might not have detracted from the amount of valuable artistic or poetic work of his own, it is impossible not to regret that he did not do for the early poetic literature of France that which he did so ably for Italy. This Rossetti to a certain extent recognised, and at one time he had indeed serious thoughts of undertaking the task, and more than once I have heard him refer to the possibility of its execution after all; but the pressure of as many commissions for pictures as he could find time to execute, and the desire of original poetic creation, prevented little being done.<sup>1</sup> Yet, leaving aside the essentially creative bent of Rossetti's genius, it is fairly manifest that such translatable work as would deal with men like Ronsard, Joachim du Bellay, Remy Belleau, Étienne Jodelle, and others of the "Pleiad" and the period, would not have been a difficult task to him. At the same time, these poets did not excite in him much beyond interest, feeling as he did in their productions the lack of "backbone," of original gift worth possessing.

Rossetti's few published translations outside of *Dante and His Circle* are to be found in his *Poems*, while in the *Ballads and Sonnets* are two admirable specimens of his powers of translating English into Italian, namely, the sonnets *Proserpina* and *La Bella Mano*; both translations and not the originals of the English versions. The former is especially beautiful,

<sup>1</sup> Those interested in the subject will find some clever renderings in the *Ballads and Lyrics of Old France*, by Mr. Andrew Lang.

and it is remarkable how the same effects are produced, not only in both versions, but even in corresponding lines: two of the most marked examples will suffice to show this, viz. the last three lines of the octave and the fourth and fifth of the sestet—

“Afar those skies from this Tartarean gray  
That chills me : and afar, how far away,  
The nights that shall be from the days that were.”

*Lungi quel cielo dal tartureo manto  
Che quì mi cuopre : e lungi ahì lungi ahì quanto  
Le notti che saràn dai dì che furo.*

“(Whose sounds mine inner sense is fain to bring  
Continually together murmuring),—  
‘Woe’s me for thee, unhappy Proserpine!’”

*(Di cui mi giunge il suon da quando in quando,  
Continuamente insieme sospirando),—  
Oimè per te, Proserpina infelice !*

A further example will be found in *A Last Confession*, if indeed the Italian is not there the original—a supposition which seems to me decidedly the more probable, judging from internal evidence.

In saying that Rossetti’s published translations outside of *Dante and His Circle* were to be found in the *Poems*, I forgot to mention two fine sets of verses from Niccolò Tommaseo, composed in 1874. They were sent to the *Athenæum* shortly after the death of the Italian writer, with a supplementary letter by the translator remarking on the peculiarity “in those dark yearning days of the Italian muse” of Tommaseo’s early lyrical poetry being in great part free from mention or influence of public events and interests; and offering them to the editor on the ground that their “delicate and romantic tone” might not be unaccept-

able to readers of the journal. As these have never been reprinted, and as they have been much admired by many good judges, I cannot do better than give them both in full.

I.—THE YOUNG GIRL.

Even as a child that weeps  
Lulled by the love it keeps,  
My grief lies back and sleeps.

Yes, it is Love bears up  
My soul on his spread wings,  
Which the days would else chafe out  
With their infinite harassings.  
To quicken it he brings  
The inward look and mild  
That thy face wears, my child.

As in a gilded room  
Shines 'mid the braveries  
Some wild-flower, by the bloom  
Of its delicate quietness  
Recalling the forest-trees  
In whose shadow it was,  
And the water and the green grass :—

Even so, 'mid the stale loves  
The city prisoneth,  
Thou touchest me gratefully,  
Like nature's wholesome breath :  
Thy heart nor hardeneth  
In pride, nor putteth on  
Obeisance not its own.

Not thine the skill to shut  
The love up in thine heart,  
Neither to seem more tender,  
Less tender than thou art.  
Thou dost not hold apart  
In silence when thy joys  
Most long to find a voice.



Let the proud river-course,  
That shakes its mane and champs,  
Run between marble shores  
By the light of many lamps,  
While all the ooze and the damp  
Of the city's choked-up ways  
Make it their draining-place.

Rather the little stream  
For me ; which, hardly heard,  
Unto the flower, its friend,  
Whispers as with a word :  
The timid journeying bird  
Of the pure drink that flows  
Takes but one drop, and goes

## II.—A FAREWELL.

I soothed and pitied thee : and for thy lips,—  
A smile, a word (sure guide  
To love that's ill to hide !)  
Was all I had thereof.

Even as an orphan boy, whom, sore distress'd,  
A gentle woman meets beside the road  
And takes him home with her,—so to thy breast  
Thou didst take home my image : pure abode !  
'Twas but a virgin's dream. This heart bestow'd  
Respect and piety  
And friendliness on thee :  
But it is poor in love.

No, I am not for thee. Thou art too new,  
I am too old, to the old beaten way.  
The griefs are not the same which grieve us two :  
Thy thought and mine lie far apart to-day.  
Less than I wish, more than I hope, always  
Are heart and soul in thee.  
Thou art too much for me,  
Sister, and not enough.

A better and a fresher heart than mine  
Perchance may meet thee ere thy youth be told ;  
Or, cheated by the longing that is thine,  
Waiting for life perchance thou shalt wax old.  
Perchance the time may come when I may hold  
It had been best for me  
To have had thy ministry  
On the steep path and rough.

The translations published in the *Poems* are nine in number, all short, and comprise one from Sappho, three from Italian, and five from old French. Of these three are from François Villon, the *Ballad of Dead Ladies* already referred to, *To Death, of His Lady*, and *His Mother's Service to our Lady*, neither of the two latter, however, being equal to the *Dead Ladies* in the original or in translation. After these follow two styled *Old French*,—*John of Tours* and *My Father's Close*, the first being one of those pathetic but practically absurd and unreal ballads of Old France, and which can now best be read in Gérard de Nerval's rendering from the old time version, and the second, with its musical repetitive "Fly away, O my heart, away!" such a charming *chanson* as Ronsard or Remy Belleau would have delighted in.<sup>1</sup> The sixth rendering is a combination from Sappho, in the original *Poems* called *One Girl*, subsequently in the Tauchnitz edition and afterwards altered to *Beauty*; two triplets remarkable for their exquisite and refined grace of expression. *Youth and Lordship*, a translation of the Italian street song *Gioventù e Signoria*, *The Leaf* by Leopardi, and a famous passage from the *Inferno* are

<sup>1</sup> If this poem is simply *in the style* of the old French and really an original composition, not improbably this burden was suggested by the nightingale line in Franco Sacchetti's *On a Wet Day*, *Più bel ve', più bel ve'*—translated by Rossetti "Fly away, O die away!"

added to the 1881 reissue of the *Poems*. The last-named is the most beautiful rendering of the episode of Paolo and Francesca.

In such a collection of sonnets, *canzonieri*, and *ballata* as is comprised in *Dante and His Circle*,<sup>1</sup> it is difficult to specify this or that translation as being especially admirable where all are admirable; and when it is remembered that with only one or two exceptions at the outside the translator kept literally to the original metres throughout, and that the renderings are of such uniform merit (reading more like original poems than translations—herein being the true test of their excellence after literality is proved) our admiration and gratification are increased. From the most solemn and pathetic lines of Dante, the true feeling of Guido Cavalcanti, and the beauty of such a supreme love-poem as the *canzone* on *Angiola of Verona* by Fazio Degli Uberti, to the very indifferent recriminations of Forese Donati and the clever catches of Franco Sacchetti, there is an equal level of the highest merit from a translatable point of view. The list of authors is an imposing one, consisting of over sixty in all, in the first part comprising, besides the great name of Dante Alighieri, such names as Guido Cavalcanti (represented by about 30 compositions), Cino da Pistoia (by 12), Dante da Maiano (by 4), and Cecco Angiolieri (by 23); the compositions throughout the volume being as follows:—In the *Sonnet* form, 141; in the *Canzone* form, 30; in the *Ballata*, 15; in the *Canzonetta*, 8; and in various forms, comprising the *Sestina*, *Sentenze*, *Cantica*, *Madrigal*, *Dialogue*, and *Blank Verse*, 16—in all, 210.

<sup>1</sup> Originally issued in 1861 as *The Early Italian Poets*: revised, rearranged, and added to in 1874 under the title just quoted.

Amongst those renderings specially admirable for translativè excellence and inherent poetic merit may be mentioned Dante Alighieri's *canzone* beseeching Death for the life of Beatrice, the beautiful *sestina* dealing (according to the translator's conjecture) *Of the Lady Pietra degli Scrovigni*, with its unmediæval-like opening lines—

"To the dim light and the large circle of shade  
I have clomb, and to the whitening of the hills,  
There where we see no colour in the grass"—

and his bitter sonnet on fruitless love; the *canzone* *A Dispute with Death*, of Guido Cavalcanti; Cino's *canzone* on the death of Beatrice Portinari; Lapo Gianni's *ballata* for his Lady Lagia; Simone dall' Antella's prolonged sonnet on the last days of the Emperor Henry VII.; Giovanni Boccaccio's three beautiful sonnets, Nos. IV. V. and VI., the second (*Of his Last Sight of Fiammetta*) being that subsequently painted on the frame of Rossetti's *A Vision of Fiammetta*, with the first line altered to

"*Mild glowing blossoms and o'er golden hair;*"

Ciullo d'Alcamo's charming Dialogue between a Lover and Lady; the *canzone* by the Emperor Frederick II.; Guido Guinicelli's *canzone* *Of the Gentle Heart*, and that on his rashness in love; Jacopo da Lentino's naïve sonnet *Of his Lady in Heaven*, and others; Giacomino Pugliesi's pathetically beautiful *canzone* on his dead lady; Folgore da San Geminiano's interesting and picturesque seventeen sonnets on the months and week days, already referred to; Guido delle Colonne's *canzone*; that of Prinzivalle Doria; the highly picturesque prolonged sonnet of Niccolò degli Albizzi on the de-

feated troops entering Milan ; Fazio degli Uberti's superb *canzone* on *Angiola of Verona*, which I shall refer to again shortly ; Franco Sacchetti's charming *ballata* and amusing *catches* ; and finally a short *ballata* by an anonymous poet, which I shall quote as a conclusion to this enumeration.

#### BALLATA.

##### *Of True and False Singing.*

A little wild bird sometimes at my ear  
Sings his own little verses very clear :  
Others sing louder that I do not hear.

For singing loudly is not singing well ;  
But ever by the song that's soft and low  
The master-singer's voice is plain to tell.

Few have it, and yet all are masters now,  
And each of them can trill out what he calls  
His ballads, canzonets, and madrigals.

The world with masters is so covered o'er,  
There is no room for pupils any more.

Regarding the *canzone* of Fazio degli Uberti—this exquisite love-song appears in most editions of the *canzonieri* of Dante, but there has been wide divergence of opinion on the right of its being there. Of modern commentators, Sir Theodore Martin in his introduction to the *Vita Nuova* considers it a portrait of Beatrice Portinari by the great author of the *Commedia*, but only on very conjectural grounds ; while Rossetti, agreeing with such learned authorities as Ubaldini, Monti, and Fraticelli, the evidence of the last-named especially being of great moment, is of decided opinion that it is by the talented exile who in old age wrote the *Dittamondo*, or *Song of the World*. Whether by

Dante or Fazio it is beautiful in a high degree; and certainly it is difficult to commiserate the grandson of that Farinata degli Uberti of whom Dante speaks in the *Inferno*, if by his exile in Verona he indeed won such a bride as Angiola is described to be, the excellence of whose spiritual loveliness, we are told, is even greater than that of her bodily beauty.

## CHAPTER V.

### POEMS—LYRICAL AND OTHERWISE.

To Rossetti's established position and strongly-marked influence in literature reference has already been made in the first chapter, and the scope of this chapter, which must necessarily be brief, will be confined entirely to a short consideration of the forty or fifty compositions which belong neither to his sonnet nor his ballad work, but which may be best classified as *Poems, Lyrics, and Songs*. In referring to these I shall not attempt any exact chronological arrangement as when describing the pictures, for the reason that where once right I should probably be twice wrong, there being only comparatively few written out of the period mentioned in the author's prefatory note (1847—1853); one or two are known as his earliest productions, and one or two as his later, and between the Alpha of *The Blessèd Damozel* and the Omega of the two sonnets for the design of *The Question* (the sonnets he wrote for Mr. Theodore Watts's volume a week or two before his death), there are few poems bearing internal evidence of the exact date of their composition. In the first chapter I referred to three compositions, which, however, can find no place in any account of his writings for the reason that one is destroyed, one lost or destroyed, and one a boyish experiment which the author wished to remain unde-

scribed, and from which it would, therefore, be unjust to quote ; the first of these being the dramatic attempt entitled *The Slave*, said to be written at the age of five, or, according to his own statement, "somewhere about five;" the second being a mature production called *The Wife's Tragedy*, which only a very few have seen, and which was based upon a fact of the author's acquaintance ; while the third is *Sir Hugh the Heron*, the only points of interest regarding which have been already noted.

It has already been shown that at sixteen Rossetti was strongly attracted to the poetry of Sir Walter Scott and the border and ballad literature, and that to this succeeded a strong admiration for that of Browning, as manifested about his twenty-first year in one or two early water-colours and an attempted large oil painting ; but before he came of age in the legal sense of the term his influences were only the general ones of circumstance, country, education, and temperament, and a maturity of style was reached in *The Blessèd Damozel* and *My Sister's Sleep* which far exceeded that attained by him in art at the corresponding date—indeed, the young poet may be said to have reached the platform of literary maturity while he was yet learning the grammar of painting.

Decidedly the first two poems of the *Poems* that were composed were *The Blessèd Damozel* and *My Sister's Sleep*, but it will be more convenient to refer first to the longer compositions, these comprising (omitting *Eden Bower*, *Troy Town*, *Sister Helen*, etc., as ballads), *The Bride's Prelude*, *Dante at Verona*, *A Last Confession*, *Jenny*, *The Burden of Nineveh*, and *The Stream's Secret*—these, with the exception of the first-named, belonging to a



different style than that characteristic of *The Blessed Damozel* and several of the earlier poems corresponding to the "Preraphaelite"<sup>1</sup> period of the artist.

*The Bride's Prelude*, written before the author's twenty-fifth year, was not published till 1881, though it had been read by, or rather read to, many during the long interval. It belongs unmistakably to the same period wherein the artist found such fascination in mediæval Italian and English Arthurian legend and history, and is replete with that same glow of colour, amounting to crude excess, characteristic of the years wherein were produced the *Roman de la Rose*, *La Belle Dame sans Mercy*, *The Chapel before the Lists*, and so many other water-colour drawings similar in conception and execution. It was never finished, unfortunately, and the author hesitated long whether he should print it in his volume or keep it in manuscript till inclination and time enabled him to complete it. On no poem of Rossetti's were the opinions of his friends as conflicting as on this. While Mr. Swinburne, for instance, placed it almost at the head of his works, and sent him some enthusiastic lines upon it, Mr. Theodore Watts objected so strongly to its hardness and rawness of execution that Rossetti went through the poem line by line with the view of rectifying this defect, and consequently the poem has undergone very considerable changes since it used to be read out to his friends. The poem has still faults, it is true,—is even perhaps the most markedly immature production appearing in the two printed volumes by its author; but it is yet charged with a richness

<sup>1</sup> See remarks on page 71, *ante*, as to the misuse of this term as applied to poetry.

that suggests the influence of him who described so inimitably the chamber of Madeleine in the *Eve of St. Agnes*, and has a fascination peculiar to the imaginative mediævalism of the art-work of the author at this period. The heavy scents coming from the perfumed gardens beyond the "bride's" window, the rich heavy curtains stifling sound that comes harshly and letting it pass only in murmurs, and the ample sensuous descriptions, have an effect upon the sensitive reader similar to that of music of a dreamy kind heard through lemon or palm tree boughs in some tropically rich but overheated conservatory. For a time the sensation is delicious or restful, but the imagination soon becomes morbid, and the spiritual atmosphere unhealthy. Here and there throughout the poem there are fine dramatic touches, and once or twice highly picturesque sidelights from nature, as this, where the "bride" with her premonitions of death and disaster looks out upon the "swarthy sea"—

"Night lapsed. At dawn the sea was there  
And the sea-wind : afar  
The ravening surge was hoarse and loud,  
And underneath the dim dawn cloud  
Each stalking wave shook like a shroud."

Of a very different style, both in conception and execution, is *Dante at Verona*—a fine and noble piece of work, and that which the author originally intended should give the title to his first volume—*Dante at Verona, and other Poems*—forming as it would therein one of the chief compositions, at that time beyond doubt *the* chief as regards sustained power. There is a fine reticence, a fine reserve of power, manifest throughout, and from first to last no false note jars upon the

reader with the suggestion that the impulse has somewhat flagged, or that the labour is not wholly *con amore*. But certainly no one of Rossetti's poems was written under truer obedience to that cardinal law of creative art, the law of natural impulse, to which Dante attributed his superiority to his contemporaries in the lines—

“Io mi son un che quando  
Amor mi spira, noto, ed in quel modo  
Ch’ ei detta dentro, vo significando.”

It may be said to owe more to the almost unconscious white-heat of inspiration than to the direct exercise of the artistic gift—in a word, it is pre-eminently from *the heart* of the poet in contradistinction to what might simply be called “work of a poet;” on this count, therefore, ranking as pure poetry above much else admirable work by the author, suffering as much thereof frequently does from over-elaboration. It may be taken for granted that had there been many illustrations from nature amongst the stanzas they would have been amongst the truest and least laboured nature-lines he had written, but to Rossetti, except in a few noteworthy instances, I doubt if nature was ever much more than a picturesque accessory. He *certainly* did not love it as a poet,—neither with the passion of Shelley, the joy of Keats, the deep understanding of Wordsworth, nor the enthusiasm of Burns; and though lines here and lines there may be taken from his poems replete with beauty and concise accuracy, yet they are markedly exceptions to the rule. Where the heart is not the spirit does not care to dwell, and, save only in what are most unmistakably his moments of inspiration, natural images have ever

to be summoned and come not of themselves thronging upon the mind. To give one instance,—the first that comes to my mind,—one can no more imagine Rossetti having written Browning's beautiful and exactly descriptive lines—

"Hark ! where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge  
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover  
Blossoms, and dewdrops—at the bent spray's edge—  
That's the wise thrush ; he sings each song twice over  
Lest you should think he never could recapture  
The first fine careless rapture !"

than one can conceive Mr. Browning writing of the same bird's song—

"The embowered throstle's urgent wood-notes soar :"

not that the latter is not quite true and fine in its way, but the first is the inspiration of a poet and supremely fine, and the second is the elaborate diction of one who yields to no "fine careless rapture."

To return to *Dante at Verona*, I may again call attention to the fact that in this poem of eighty-five stanzas there is not one that arrests readers by its mediocrity, but each stanza is like a whole and perfect link, inseparably part of the golden chain. Now and again comes in a line that like a refrain gives the central emotion of the poem, the significant phrase from Dante's own lips, *Even I, even I am Beatrice* ; and there is at times a touch of that humanity which makes us all kin, as in that exquisite thirty-second verse wherein the great Italian's modern namesake divines that often the sad exiled poet must have felt, when pressing his forehead against the painted pane of some window in Can la Scala's court which the

rain beat upon, as it were the fingers of Beatrice with cooling caressing touch upon his brow, while when the sunlight poured therein it is as though her breath warmed his face and hair. The only rhythmical break there is in the whole length of the poem occurs some further stanzas on, where the line "And where the night-vigil was done" requires to be read with the accent on the latter syllable of "vigil," a condemnable affectation if conscious, which, however, I doubt, owing to the writer's frequently deficient ear as to dissyllabic words. No exile ever sent a nobler reply to amnesty on shameful terms than Dante sent to the Florentine Republic from his Veronese refuge, and hardly is any finer rendering of the spirit of that famous response conceivable than that embodied in the following noble lines :—

"That since no gate led, by God's will,  
To Florence, but the one whereat  
The priests and money-changers sat,  
He still would wander ; for that still,  
Even through the body's prison-bars,  
His soul possessed the sun and stars."

A few stanzas further on are those terrible lines on a Republic unfaithful to its noblest principles, lines which could only have been written by the author's having lost his own personality in that of the bitterly indignant exile, lines which Rossetti never equalled in scathing strength, save perhaps in the passionate scorn of an unpublished sonnet on *The French Liberation in Italy*. The alterations that *Dante at Verona* has undergone have been very slight, and are mostly to be found in altered words here and there in the 1881 edition, though there an awkward misprint is to be found in the first line of the fourth verse from the

end, where instead of "He went and turned not" is printed "He went and turned out." In the 1881 reissue was also added a third verse to those so bitterly condemning the republic, which, as many will only possess one of the earlier editions, it will be as well to transcribe—

"Such *this* Republic!—not the Maid  
He yearned for ; she who yet should stand  
With Heaven's accepted hand in hand,  
Invulnerable and unbetray'd :  
To whom, even as to God, should be  
Obeisance one with Liberty."

*A Last Confession* is Rossetti's dramatic *chef-d'œuvre*, and at the same time exhibitivè of his mastership over the difficult medium of blank verse. The story is throughout kept coherently in hand and every incident has stamped upon it the unmistakable stamp of veracity to country and circumstance ; and it is difficult whether to admire most the representation of the passionate love and devotion of the unfortunate lover or the delicately beautiful passages descriptive of the girl's loveliness, or those unfolding his dawning love. I do not know in exactly what estimation the author held it himself, but I remember his telling me that about the best review he had ever had "spoke with justice" of his three chief poems being *A Last Confession*, *Dante at Verona*, and *The Burden of Nineveh*. If the influence of Browning is manifest at all in Rossetti's poetic work it is manifested here, at the same time it is not to be seen in style or even choice of subject, but only in the masterly delineation of character and the power of dramatic realisation. How the speaker in the poem—the same who awaits abso-

lution from God if not from the priest, and death from the executioner—first meets the woman, whom he afterwards killed to save her from further degradation, as a little deserted orphan on the hill-slope is beautifully told and also how he brought her up and how she became the delight of his life, solitary as that life had to be in the case of one who was called a patriot by his countrymen but a rebel by the Austrian masters of Italy: and that is a fine utterance which the condemned man makes when recalling his past life to his confessor—

“Life all past  
Is like the sky when the sun sets in it,  
Clearest where farthest off.”

The lines succeeding these describing the lover's dream are such as would not read amiss in the *Vita Nuova*, and their beauty possesses the same quaint fascination as that characteristic of so many of the artist's pictures; and in the midst of them there is an imaginative touch almost equal to the splendid simile of a like nature in *The Blessèd Damozel*, that, namely, where

“I thought our world was setting, *and the sun*  
*Flared, a spent taper.*”

The incident of the early gift the hunted patriot gave to the child he had taken under his care, that of “a little image of a flying Love,” is pathetically told, while a deep and painful significance underlies its destruction. And surely nothing more exquisite of its kind has been done in English poetry than the revelation of how she is a woman while he still thought of her as a child; and how a love that had hitherto been with him unconsciously surges in upon

him overwhelmingly as a sudden tide upon an outlying strand.

"For now, being always with her, the first love I had—the father's, brother's love—was changed, I think, in some wise; like a holy thought Which is a prayer before one knows of it. The first time I perceived this, I remember, Was once when after hunting I came home Weary, and she brought food and fruit for me, And sat down at my feet upon the floor Leaning against my side. But when I felt Her sweet head reach from that low seat of hers So high as to be laid upon my heart, I turned and looked upon my darling there And marked for the first time how tall she was; And my heart beat with so much violence Under her cheek, I thought she could not choose But wonder at it soon and ask me why; And so I bade her rise and eat with me. And when, remembering all and counting back The time, I made out fourteen years for her<sup>1</sup> And told her so, *she gazed at me with eyes As of the sky and sea on a gray day, And drew her long hands through her hair, and asked me If she was not a woman; and then laughed: And as she stooped in laughing, I could see Beneath the growing throat the breasts half globed Like folded lilies deep set in the stream.*"

Having quoted thus far I cannot refrain from quoting further the passages describing the young girl's loveliness, containing lines as exquisite as those I have italicised above.

"She had a mouth  
Made to bring death to life,—the under lip  
Sucked in, as if it strove to kiss itself.

---

<sup>1</sup> It must be remembered that this is not too immature an age for an Italian peasant girl to be a woman.



Her face was ever pale, as when one stoops  
Over wan water ; and the dark crisped hair  
And the hair's shadow made it paler still :—  
Deep-serried locks, the dimness of the cloud  
Where the moon's gaze is set in eddying gloom.  
*Her body bore her neck as the tree's stem  
Bears the top branch ; and as the branch sustains  
The flower of the year's pride, her high neck bore  
That face made wonderful with night and day.  
Her voice was swift, yet ever the last words  
Fell lingeringly ; and rounded finger-tips  
She had, that clung a little where they touched  
And then were gone o' the instant. Her great eyes,  
That sometimes turned half-dizzily beneath  
The passionate lids, as faint, when she would speak,  
Had also in them hidden springs of mirth,  
Which under the dark lashes evermore  
Shook to her laugh, as when a bird flies low  
Between the water and the willow-leaves,  
And the shade quivers till he wins the light."*

On the other hand, I have never been able to admire to the same extent that more than one well-known writer has done the third line of the above, "the under lip sucked in as if it strove to kiss itself," in the first place the phrase seeming to me the only overstrained line in the whole description, and in the next it seems to me to rather detract from the beauty of the girl than add to it ; but the succeeding passages are beyond doubt exquisite in the highest degree. Then what delicate grace there is in the song beginning *La bella donna Piangendo disse*, with its almost equally fine English rendering, antecedent to the lovely picture as the twain leave the Duomo and cross the public place, where from the splashing fountains to "the pigeon-haunted pinnacles" there seems nothing in the bright air but sparkling water and winnowing wings, and where all men's eyes are turned on the girl's beauty

as she passes with "clear-swayed waist and towering neck and hands held light before her." Then the dramatic and terrible close of his love, when there came upon him as he stood, nigh hunted to death, for the last time with her whom he loved upon the sand at Iglio, as it were

"a fire

That burnt my hand ; and then the fire was blood,  
And sea and sky were blood and fire, and all  
The day was one red blindness ;"

and he knows nothing more till he finds her after her taunting harlot laugh lying dead before him, with a knife in her heart, and the sand scooped by her stiff bodice into her bosom. An almost painful dramatic effect is given frequently throughout the poem by the mention of her laugh, from its first childish innocence to its degraded later significance : and it is with the fear of hearing that accusing laugh even before the throne of God that the unhappy man goes to his death in horror.

The only material alterations in *A Last Confession* are in the lines

"Within the whirling brain's eclipse that she  
Or I or all things bled or burned to death,"

as now appearing in the Tauchnitz and 1881 editions, superseding the former reading, "Within the whirling brain's entanglement That she or I or all things bled to death;" and again, in the later substitution of the word *steel* for *blade* in the final line.

Regarding the noble poem called *The Burden of Nineveh* even Mr. Swinburne hardly exaggerates in his enthusiastic eulogy, it being characterised by lofty thought and noble diction sufficient alone to base an enduring reputation upon. The metre, as Mr. Swin-

burne pointed out at the time of publication (1870), "is a new one for English hands;" and in his enthusiastic and generous review-essay of that date he interprets its spirit in words that in themselves form the substance of a poem, two sentences from which, being specially pregnant, I shall quote: "We hear in it, as it were for once, the sound of Time's soundless feet, feel for once the beat of his unfelt wings in their passage through unknown places, and centuries without form and void. Echoes and gleams come with it from 'the dark backward and abysm' of dateless days; a sighing sound from the graves of gods, a wind through the doors of death which opened on the early world."

To a greater extent than any other composition by the poet, it fulfils Keats' dictum—"in all true poetry there is an element of prophecy, an inner vision, the scope of which is not, and ought not to be, comprehended at once."<sup>1</sup> It exhibits at once a wide sympathy, deep spiritual insight, and that prophetic interpretation of mystery that convinces at once of genius of a high order. How bitter, too, is that verse which speaks of the winged Bull-God which had the worship of generations offered before it, which beheld the lapse of time and the birth and death of centuries, and which looked on these ultimate fifteen days of devastating fire, wherein "smouldered to a name Sardanapalus' Nineveh," exposed to ignorant and foolish babblers—

"While school-foundations in the act  
Of holiday, three files compact,  
Shall learn to view thee as a fact  
Connected with that zealous tract:  
    'Rome—Babylon and Nineveh.'"

Could they who dwelt in the far-off forgotten days, ere

<sup>1</sup> Except or perhaps equally with *Rose Mary* and *The King's Tragedy*.

"the glory mouldered and did cease from immemorial Nineveh," have dreamt of this humiliation—this which was to them the visible habitation for a time of the Lord of Life—

"Deemed they of this, those worshippers,  
When, in some mythic chain of verse  
Which man shall not again rehearse,  
The faces of thy ministers  
Yearned pale with bitter ecstasy?"

But, the poet goes on to say, a day may come "when some may question which was first, of London or of Nineveh," and some habitant of Australian civilisation in the dim future may in turn bear away this winged god as a relic, not now of Nineveh but London; or it may be that farther off still, when the present will seem but the childhood of the human race, some may find in the ruined waste that once was London this sculptured form, and infer therefrom that the perished race who dwelt in the great city bowed before it as their God—idolaters, and walking not in "Christ's lowly ways."

*The Burden of Nineveh* was written before the author's twenty-fifth year, and was first published in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* (1856), with two more verses than when issued in 1870, which latter edition had also many important corrections. That the author considered the latest version unimprovable is evident from the fact that since 1870 no alteration of any kind has been made in it. Parallel passages will enable the reader unacquainted with the exceedingly scarce *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* of 1856 to realise that the poem was a fine one from the first, and also how conscientious in alteration and deletion the author was—

1858.

*Verse 1.*

(First five lines out of harmony  
with the rest.)

Round those still floors I tramp'd,  
to win  
By the great porch the dust and din;  
And as I made the last door spin  
And issued, they were hoisting in  
A wing'd beast from Nineveh.

*Verse 3.*

Some colour'd Arab straw matting,  
Half-ripp'd, was still upon the  
thing

etc.      etc.

(Not in original.)

(See last five lines of Verse 4  
below.)

*Verse 4.*

On London stones our sun anew,  
The beast's recovered shadow threw;  
No shade that plague of darkness  
knew,  
No light, no shade, while older grew  
By ages the old earth and sea.  
Oh! seem'd it not—that spell once  
broke  
As though the sculptured warrior  
woke,  
As though the shaft the string for-  
sook,  
The cymbals clash'd, the chariots  
shook  
And there was life in Nineveh?

1870 *et seq.**Verse 1.*

Sighing, I turned at last to win  
Once more the London dirt and  
din;  
And as I made the swing-door spin,  
And issued, etc.

*Verse 3.*

The print of its first rush-wrapping,  
Wound ere it dried, still ribbed the  
thing

etc.      etc.

*Verse 4.*

Oh, when upon each sculptured court,  
Where even the wind might not  
resort,—  
O'er which Time passed, of like  
import  
With the wild Arab boys at sport,—  
A living face looked in to see:—  
Oh, seemed it not—the spell once  
broke—  
As though the carven warriors woke,  
As though the shaft the string for-  
sook,  
The cymbals clashed, the chariots  
shook,  
And there was life in Nineveh.

*Verse 5.*

On London stones our sun anew  
The beast's recovered shadow threw.  
(No shade that plague of darkness  
knew,  
No light, no shade, while older  
grew  
By ages the old earth and sea.)  
Lo thou! could all thy priests have  
shown  
Such proof to make thy godhead  
known?  
From their dead Past thou liv'st  
alone;  
And still thy shadow is thine own  
Even as of yore in Nineveh.

1858.

*Verse 5.*

On London stones its shape lay  
 scored,  
 That day when, nigh the gates, the  
 Lord  
                   etc.        etc.

*Verse 6.*

. . . . .  
 Here cold-pinned clerks on yellow  
 days  
 Shall stop and peer; and in sun's  
 haze  
 Small clergy crimp their eyes to  
 gaze;  
 And misses titter in their stays  
     Just fresh from "Layard's  
     Nineveh."

*Verse 7.*

Here while the antique students  
 lunch,  
 Shall art be slanged o'er cheese-  
 and-hunch,  
 Whether the great R.A.'s a bunch  
 Of gods or dogs, and whether Punch  
     Is right about the P.R.B.  
 Here, etc.

*Verse 8 (last two lines).*

An elder scarce more unknown God  
 Should house with him from  
 Nineveh.

*Verse 9.*

Ah! in what quarries lay the stone  
 From which this pigmy pile has  
     grown,  
 Unto man's need how long unknown,  
 Since thy vast temple, court and  
     cone  
     Rose far in desert history!

1870 *et seq.**Verse 6.*

That day whereof we keep record,  
 When near thy city gates the Lord  
                   etc.        etc.

*Verse 7.*

Or pale Semiramis her zones  
     Of gold, her incense brought  
         to thee,  
 In love for grace, in war for aid: . . .  
 Ay, and who else? . . . till 'neath  
     thy shade  
 Within his trenches newly made  
 Last year the Christian knelt and  
     pray'd—  
     Not to thy strength—in Nine-  
     veh.

*Verse 8.*

Now, thou poor god, within this  
     hall  
 Where the blank windows blind the  
     wall  
 From pedestal to pedestal,  
 The kind of light shall on thee fall  
     Which London takes the day  
         to be:  
 Here, etc.

*Verse 9.*

Another scarce more, etc.

*Verse 10.*

Ah! in what quarries lay the stone  
 From which this pillar'd pile has  
     grown,  
 Unto man's need how long unknown,  
 Since these thy temples, court and  
     cone,  
     Rose far in desert history!

1858.

Verse 10.

One out of Egypt to thy home,  
A pilgrim. Nay, but even to some  
Of these thou wert antiquity !  
etc. etc.

Verse 14.

Delicate harlot,—eldest grown  
Of earthly queens ! thou on thy  
throne  
etc. etc.

Verse 15.

Then waking up, I turn'd because  
That day my spirit might not pause  
O'er any dead thing's doleful laws ;  
That day all hope with glad ap-  
plause  
Through miles of London  
beckoned me :  
And all the wealth of Life's free  
choice,  
Love's ardour, friendship's equipoise  
And Ellen's gaze and Philip's voice  
And all that evening's curtain'd  
joys  
Struck pale my dream of Nine-  
veh.

Verse 16.

Yet while I walk'd, etc.

1870 *et seq.*

Verse 11.

One out of Egypt to thy home,  
An alien. Nay, but were not some  
Of these thine own "an-  
tiquity" ?  
etc. etc.

Verse 15.

Delicate harlot ! on thy throne  
Thou with a world beneath thee  
prone,  
etc. etc.

Verse 16.

... Here woke my thought. The  
wind's slow sway  
Had waxed ; and like the human  
play  
Of scorn that smiling spreads away,  
The sunshine shivered off the day :  
The callous wind, it seemed to  
me,  
Swept up the shadow from the  
ground :  
And pale as whom the Fates astound,  
The God forlorn stood winged and  
crown'd :  
Within I knew the cry lay bound  
Of the dumb soul of Nineveh.

Verse 17.

And as I turned, etc.

In each instance, it will be observed, the alteration is an improvement, unless perhaps in the case of the fifth line of the eleventh verse. To the earlier copy there was prefixed the following line :—

"Burden. Heavy calamity ; the chorus of a song.—*Dictionary*.

And it may also be noted that as in only one of his extant pictures (*The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*) did Rossetti use the initials of the "Brotherhood" after his

name,<sup>1</sup> so the only instance of his referring to it in print occurs in the fifth line of the seventh verse of the 1858 copy.

As an example of that strange critical incapacity which in many instances greeted the first appearance of the *Poems* may be mentioned an (unsigned) review in the *Atlantic Monthly* by a writer of distinction on a different platform, Mr. W. D. Howells, who in this hasty and bald fashion disposes of the two last-mentioned poems—"Dante at Verona makes no very impressive figure, and *The Burden of Nineveh* rests heavily upon the reader." Speaking of the ballads (*Sister Helen*, *Troy-Town*, *Eden Bower*, etc.) in the *Poems*, the same writer says, "These ballads are the poorest of Mr. Rossetti's poems . . . some of them are very poor indeed, and others are quite idle," an assertion that will strike most judges of poetry as somewhat startling.

The long poem called *Jenny* is undoubtedly, despite all that has been urged against it, a very fine poem, full of exquisite artistic touches and broad and trenchant reflection, and with one especially very effective and picturesque and noble passage; but I can no more agree with Mr. Swinburne's opinion of it—"above them all in reach and scope of power stands the poem of *Jenny*; great among the few greatest works of the artist . . . a Divine pity fills it, or a pity something better than Divine, the more just and deeper compassion of human fellowship and fleshly brotherhood. Here is nothing of sickly fiction or theatrical violence of tone," etc. etc.—than I can with the wholesale condemnation in favour with some. After reading it again and again, and ever willing to think the fault must lie with myself, I have

<sup>1</sup> Excepting the pen-and-ink sketch of *Hesterna Rosa*.



each time come to the same conclusion, that the pathos Mr. Swinburne considers its distinctive quality is *literary* pathos, and not sprung in the first instance from a sorrowful heart or a deep personal sense of "the pity of it, the pity of it,"<sup>1</sup> and that, in consequence, "a Divine pity" does *not* fill it. I am aware that such a judgment will seem to many absurd, nevertheless I still consider much of *Jenny* to be rather cold-blooded speculation, and the poem itself as a whole by no means entitled to rank as "great among the few greatest works of the artist." This does not prevent it from being, in my opinion, still a fine poem, only I cannot admit what I feel to be an exaggerated claim for it. There is a literary pathos and there is a human pathos, a literary pity and a human pity, a literary speculative faculty and the deep yearning and insight arising from human sympathy; and thoughts clothed in the literary glamour may be very true and very beautiful, but they do not touch us so closely as those do wherein the loving human heart throbs like a pulse.

The only alterations in *Jenny*, which was composed in 1858 and recast later on, take place in the 1881 re-issue, where line 237 reads "with Raffael's, Leonardo's hand," instead of "with Raffael's or Da Vinci's hand," and where after line 322 ("Your pier-glass scrawled with diamond rings"), there are inserted three new lines—

"And on your bosom all night worn  
Yesterday's rose now droops forlorn,  
But dies not yet this summer morn."

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<sup>1</sup> "The heart is the creator of the poetical world; only the atmosphere is from the brain."—Walter Savage Landor's *Works*, vol. ii. p. 57 (1846). "The human heart is the world of poetry; the imagination is only its atmosphere."—W. S. L. *Works*, vol. ii. p. 213 (1846).

The inter-relation between *Jenny* and the large and important though still unfinished picture *Found* has already been pointed out in the description of the the latter.

An American critic, Mr. E. C. Stedman, in a reference to *The Stream's Secret*, remarked aptly that that poem contained more music than any *slow* lyric he could remember. There is a peculiar fascination about it which is in reality due to the subtle music of the metre, reflecting as it does in undertone the subdued murmur of "wan water, wandering water weltering," and for the reason that the cause of its beauty is not at first perceptible is doubtless how it grows more and more with every reading, till, I am certain, with many it becomes one of the chief favourites.

The "Stream" is the brown-pooled, birch-banked Penwhapple, in Ayrshire, that gurgles and lapses from slope to slope till it reaches Girvan Water, when it speedily finds its goal in the sea that sweeps the sandy coast-line without a break save for wave-washed Ailsa Craig; and in a little cavern closely overlooking the "whispering water" as it flows through the grounds of Penkill Castle (the residence of one of his chief friends, Miss A. Boyd) Rossetti composed the greater portion of *The Stream's Secret*. Published in 1870 it was written so late as in the autumn of 1869, and Mr. William Bell Scott has told me how he frequently used to look for Rossetti as the dinner hour drew near, and almost invariably found him lying in the little cavern or sprawling in the long grass and bracken along the banks; the latter, I should think, the poet must have found much more conducive to composition as the cave seemed to me rather damp, very confined, and "with

dreadful midges thronged and thirsty gnats," to parody Milton's magnificent line. He considered it one of his very best productions and it certainly cost him the most labour, very probably his opinion being greatly due to that fact as well as to its having been written "direct from nature;" but despite the labour and despite the desire to write a poem containing as much of the direct natural as the human element, there is little in it that is otherwise than literary naturalism, *i.e.* little that could not have been written as well in the studio at 16 Cheyne Walk as by the banks of the Penwhapple. Rossetti lacked that *imaginative knowledge* of nature which is quite a different thing from literary knowledge, that which remains with artistic or poetic minds very susceptible to all natural aspects almost indelibly, consciously or unconsciously, though now and again he caught and retained some subtle note which, however, really appealed to the painter's eye, not the poet's susceptibility: for instance, the accurate and beautiful "touches" in *Silent Noon*, *Autumn Idleness* (wholly fine), the line "How large that thrush looks on the bare thorn-tree" in the sonnet called *Winter*, or—

"When the leaf-shadows at a breath  
Shrink in the road,"

from *The Portrait*. Thus when finishing the poem in question in London the author desired some truthful unstereotyped aspect of nightfall, but could not draw upon that which he had not—a store of impressions gained through many years and much observation—he had to write for some hint that he might use, which he did to Miss Boyd of Penkill as follows:—

"I meant to have asked you in my note yesterday

whether you could bring to mind any feature or incident particularly characteristic of the Penkill glen at nightfall. In my poem I have made the speaker towards the close suddenly perceive that the night is coming on, and have had to give a descriptive touch or two. I expect a first proof in all probability to-morrow morning, so if I get a hint of any kind from you by next day (Friday) it would be in time to insert before I sent back the proof with revisions and possible additions." This note shows how much he wished to give it the character of a study from nature. It was the only poem he composed in the open air, except perhaps *Autumn Idleness* which, however, was not *written* out of doors. In the eleventh verse the same sad note is struck that throbs in the lyrics *Parted Presence* and *Spherical Change*, and it may be noticed how much the twenty-sixth, with its polysyllabic words, recalls some of the sonnets, particularly perhaps the sestet of the fifty-third (*Without Her*) of *The House of Life*. There is no alteration in *The Stream's Secret* save the substitution of "amulet" for "love secret" as a terminal in the twenty-fifth verse, a decided gain in musical expression if nothing else.

Amongst the lyrics and shorter poems of Rossetti the first place for lyric beauty and imagination must certainly be given to *The Blessèd Damozel*. Like *My Sister's Sleep*, it is one of his very earliest mature productions, not indeed *the* earliest, for there were several short poems of considerable merit written before it, two of which were indeed in the proofs of his first volume but were withdrawn while these were being passed for printing, *viz.* *Music and Song* and *To Mary in Summer*. *The Blessèd Damozel* is indeed an extraordinary production for a youth of nineteen to be the

author of, and to be the author of in a time when the public and critical taste had no palate for anything new ; and still more is it so when we consider that there is nothing immature in the composition from first to last. It has the vague, indefinite, but exquisite charm of such a painting by the poet-artist as *Veronica Veronese*, delicate music indescribable, beauty of a rare and subtle kind like that of twilight gray vapours suddenly faintly flushed with the rose of dawn, or a solitary star seen pulsing fierily above a purple mist shrouding swarthy headlands : it has this, and more, to a degree that the painting bearing the same name, splendid as it is, has not—for the reason that words can reach to higher heights and deeper depths than can the painter's medium, and that they can catch a music and hint a glory and loveliness beyond the limits of the limner's brush. It has been called archaic, quaint, unwholesomely mediæval, affected, etc., but the question is, is the form fitting, do the emotion and the expression move fitly together, as a beautiful song and beautiful music are as one when we listen to a fine singer ? When all has been said for and against it, the fact remains that it is one of the most original lyrics in our language, with a loveliness of wild free grace and human passion and sorrow of its own that must ever have an endless charm and delight for at least a few ; nay more, the essential humanity of the poem ensures it a place in the hearts of the young as long as love and death and sorrow and hope are themes to inspire the poet and affect those who are entering, those who have passed but still look lingeringly back to the faery valley and charmed hills of early life.

Where there are so many beauties it is difficult to specify, but at least I cannot refrain from mentioning

again what has frequently been mentioned before, the imaginative grasp of the powerful and beautiful lines of the sixth verse, and those from the ninth and tenth—

"From the fixed place of Heaven she saw  
*Time like a pulse shake fierce*  
*Through all the worlds. . . .*

The sun was gone now ; the curled moon  
 Was like a little feather  
 Fluttering far down the gulf ;" . . .

the natural beauty of

"Her eyes were deeper than the depth  
 Of waters still'd at even ;  
 (*each of the three versions being beautiful*).

"And the lilies lay as if asleep  
 Along her bended arm ;"

or the spiritual passion of—

"We two will stand beside that shrine,  
 Occult, withheld, untrod,  
 Whose lamps are stirred continually  
 With prayer sent up to God ;  
 And see our old prayers, granted, melt  
 Each like a little cloud ;"

(or as the two last lines almost as beautifully said in the original)—

"And where each need, revealed, expects  
 Its patient period."

It has been suggested to me more than once that a version of *The Blessëd Damozel* as it was written by the youth of nineteen would be very acceptable to many to whom *The Germ* is unprocurable or un-get-at-able ;

so I had the schedule drawn out of the variations from the most widely known version which is printed opposite this page. From this, of course, any one wishing to have a copy of the famous lyric by the Rossetti of nineteen can with a little trouble obtain such. It will be observed that the seventh verse is that which has been most altered; that one verse, the tenth, is absent from the original copy; that three verses from the original have been missed out in later editions; and that only the third, thirteenth, eighteenth, and twentieth verses remain without alteration since 1848. The final verse was to the last a thorn of indecision to the author, he never quite agreeing as to whether "she *cast* her arms along the golden barriers," or "she *laid* her arms, etc.," was the better, ultimately choosing, ere the proofs were returned, the earlier reading. Also in this verse he thought of altering in the 1881 edition the last four words, "I heard her tears" to "I felt her tears," but refrained on the ground that where there might be an apparent realistic gain there was spiritual loss.

*My Sister's Sleep*, the earliest of the poet's published compositions, is written in the now well-known metre of *In Memoriam*, but, as the author explains in a footnote, "this little poem" was written about three years antecedent to the Laureate's famous elegy; nor has it therefore, as on more than one occasion has been stated, any reference to a real circumstance in the author's experience, his only deceased sister being Maria Francesca who died at a much later period. The pathos of the great mystery of death is here indeed, and an indefinite "something" that seems to attract almost every one, perhaps the exquisite realism,

## THE BLESS'ED DAMOZEL.

[In the following variations only those lines are given which differ from the most widely known version (that of 1870 and the five almost uniform subsequent editions): so that, for instance, when a line is given as from *The Germ* and its equivalent from the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, it means that the rest of the verse is the same as that of 1870 *et seq.*, as also, of course, where unspecified that of the Tauchnitz and 1881 editions.]

## Verse 1.

*The Germ.*

Her blue grave eyes were deeper much  
Than a deep water even.

*Ox. and Cam. Mag.*

Her eyes knew more of rest and shade  
Than waters stilled at even.

## Verse 2.

*The Germ.*

But a white rose of Mary's gift  
On the neck meetly worn,  
And her hair, lying down her back  
Was yellow like ripe corn.

*Ox. and Cam. Mag.*

But a white rose of Mary's gift  
For service meetly worn,  
And her hair lying down her back  
Was yellow like ripe corn.

## Verse 4.

*The Germ.*

. . . Yet now, here in this place  
Surely she leaned o'er me.

## Verse 5 (4th line).

*The Germ.*

In which Space is begun. .

## Verse 6 (1st line).

*The Germ.*

It lies from Heaven across the flood—

## (Between Verses 6 and 7.)

*The Germ.*

But in those tracts, with her it was  
The peace of utter light  
And silence. For no breeze may stir  
Along the steady flight  
Of seraphim; no echo there  
Beyond all depth or height.

## Verse 7.

*The Germ.*

Heard hardly, some of her new friends  
Playing at holy games,  
Spoke, gentle-mouthed among themselves  
Their virginal new names,  
And the souls mounting up to God  
Went by her like thin flames.

*Ox. and Cam. Mag.*

She scarcely heard her sweet new friends  
Playing at holy games,  
Softly they spake among themselves  
Their virginal chaste names.

1870 *Edit.*

Heard hardly, some of her new friends  
Amid their loving games  
Spoke evermore among themselves  
Their virginal chaste names.

*Later Edit.*

Around her, lovers, newly met  
In joy no sorrow claims,  
Spoke evermore among themselves  
Their rapturous new names.

*Tauchnitz Edit.*

Around her, lovers, newly met  
'Mid deathless love's acclaims.

1881 *Edit.*

Spoke evermore among themselves  
Their heart-remembered names.

## Verse 8.

*The Germ.*

And still she bowed herself and stooped  
Into the vast waste calm,  
Till her bosom's pressure must have made  
The bar she leaned on warm.

*Ox. and Cam. Mag.*

And still she bowed above the vast  
Waste sea of worlds that swam,  
Until her bosom must have made  
The bar she leaned on warm.

## Verse 9.

*The Germ.*

From the first lull of heaven she saw  
Time, like a pulse, shake fierce  
Through all the worlds. Her gaze still  
In that steep gulf, to pierce [strove,  
The swarm: and then she spake as when  
The stars sang in their spheres.

*Ox. and Cam. Mag.*

The stars sung in their spheres.

## Verse 10.

*The Germ.*

(Absent altogether.)

*Ox. and Cam. Mag.*

Had when they sung together (6th line).



## Verse 11.

*The Germ.*

(Absent altogether.)

*Ox. and Cam. Mag.*

(Printed as Verse 17), the last two lines being :—

Was she not stepping to my side  
Down all the trembling stair?

## Verse 12 (3d and 4th lines)

*The Germ.*

Have I not prayed in solemn heaven?  
On earth has he not prayed?

## Verse 14 (3d and 4th lines).

*The Germ.*

Whose lamps tremble continually  
With prayers sent up to God,  
And where each need, revealed, expects  
Its patient period.

*Ox. and Cam. Mag.*

(Same as the later versions, except "prayers" for "prayer.")

## Verse 15 (4th line).

*The Germ.*

Sometimes is felt to be

## Verse 16 (last 4 lines).

*The Germ.*

"The songs I sing here, which his mouth  
Shall pause in, hushed and slow,  
Finding some knowledge at each pause  
And some new thing to know."

## Verse 17 [11th (O. and C.)].

*The Germ.*

(Alas to her wise simple mind  
These things were all but known  
Before; they trembled on her sense,—  
Her voice had caught their tone.  
Alas for lonely Heaven! alas  
For life wrung out alone.);

(Between Verses 17 and 18.)

The 17th in *The Germ.**The Germ.*

(Alas, and though the end were reached?  
Was thy part understood

Or borne in trust? And for her sake  
Shall this too be found good?—  
May not close lips that knew not prayer  
Praise ever though they would?)

## Verse 19.

*The Germ.*

Circle-wise sit they with bound locks  
And bosoms covered—

## Verse 21 (3d line).

*The Germ.*

Kneel—the unnumber'd solemn heads—

*Ox. and Cam. Mag.*

Kneel—the unnumber'd ransom'd heads—

## Verse 22 (last 4 lines).

*The Germ.*

To have more blessing than on earth  
In nowise; but to be  
As then we were,—being as then  
At peace. Yea, verily.

*Ox. and Cam. Mag.*

Only to live as once on earth  
At peace,—only to be  
As then awhile, for ever now  
Together, I and he.

(Between Verses 22 and 23.)

*The Germ.*

Yea, verily; when he is come  
We will do thus and thus,  
Till this my vigil seem quite strange  
And almost fabulous;  
We two will live at once, one life;  
And peace shall be with us.

## Verse 23 (5th line).

*The Germ.*

With angels, in strong level lapse.

## Verse 24 (2d and 3d lines).

*The Germ.*

Was vague 'mid the poised spheres.  
And then she cast her arms along

*Ox. and Cam. Mag.*

Was vague in distant spheres:  
And then she laid her arms along—

which is neither forced nor *outré*, nor anything but entirely natural and written with a touch of extremest delicacy and refinement. The fourth verse is a fine piece of natural description, but the finest is the tenth, with the deep suggestiveness of that which those sitting and waiting the birth of Christmas Day hearken in the stillness of the room above them,—a sudden "pushing back of chairs." The poem, however, as it now stands, is not identical with that published in *The Germ* in 1850, there being, in the first place, several material differences, especially in the first and fourth verses, while in the original are four verses not to be found in later editions, viz. two between the sixth and seventh, and two between the ninth and tenth—inferior to the rest certainly, except that following immediately on the ninth verse, wherein the mother has risen silently from her work, and says, "Glory unto the newly Born."

"She stood a moment with her hands  
Kept in each other, praying much;  
A moment that the soul may touch  
But the heart only understands."

The very beautiful hymn, if hymn it can be called, entitled *Ave* was composed at the same period (about 1858)<sup>1</sup> as the picture *Mary in the House of John*, fully described elsewhere—a poem the beauty of which caused a leading review in America (not that already referred to) to claim Rossetti as the greatest living poet of the Catholic Church. The lines from the fourteenth to the thirty-third are amongst the most beautiful the poet has written, and are permeated with the same almost indefinable beauty that characterises alike so

<sup>1</sup> *Ave* must have been composed a good deal earlier.

many of the artist-poet's works in both mediums, and in none more than these poems and pictures animated by the religious spirit. The pathetic passage beginning with the lines

“Mind'st thou not (when the twilight gone  
Left darkness in the house of John),”

is that describing, or rather illustrated by the picture. The only alteration in any printed copy is that in the 1881 edition, where the word “succinct” is substituted for “arrayed,” in the line “The Cherubim, arrayed, conjoint.” The *Ave* concludes with a fine passage wherein the poet speaks in his vision, content whichever way it is since the result is there:—

“Soul, is it Faith, or Love, or Hope,  
That lets me see her standing up  
Where the light of the Throne is bright?  
Unto the left, unto the right,  
The cherubim, succinct, conjoint,  
Float inward to a golden point,  
And from between the seraphim  
The glory issues for a hymn.”

*Love's Nocturn* is a poem of much later composition than its being placed next after the opening *Blessed Damsel* might suggest, and is a good deal altered from the original MS. Though unequal, parts of it are full of charm and grace and it may be said to be the poem of the author wherein the resemblance (apart from the suggestion of the second title-word) is very marked to some of the work of that Shelley of musicians, Frederic Chopin; but as that great, as well as sometimes fantastically beautiful composer is still but little understood, so may the comparison as well as the charm of the verses themselves be *caviare* to many:—

"Vaporous, unaccountable,  
Dreamland<sup>1</sup> lies forlorn of light,  
Hollow like a breathing shell.

"There the dreams are multitudes ;  
Some whose buoyance waits not sleep,  
Deep within the August woods ;  
Some that hum while rest may steep  
Weary labour laid a-heap ;  
Interludes,  
Some, of grievous moods that weep.

"Poets' fancies all are there :  
There the elf-girls flood with wings  
Valleys full of plaintive air ;  
There breathe perfumes ; there in rings  
Whirl the foam-bewildered springs ;  
Siren there  
Winds her dizzy hair and sings."

One more verse I shall quote, but not from any printed copy. In nine cases out of ten a critic or biographer (while he is entitled to refer to all printed matter—matter at any time made public), has no right to disinter from original MS., or copy thereof, that which an author never chose to make public himself; but there are cases where an author himself misjudges, and then, when the matter is really worth the deed, it is desirable. That such an instance is to be found in the following verse I think most will agree, if for nothing else than the second and third lines which form one of those phrases which once widely apprehended seldom

<sup>1</sup> In the 1881 edition "dreamworld;" as also the same substitution in the last line of the twentieth verse. The fifth line above quoted there reads "some that will not wait for sleep," and in the fifth line of the seventeenth verse, the word "prayers" is inserted in place of "words."

pass again from a people's usage ; the stanza in question comes, in the original, between the seventh and eighth—

“ As, since man waxed deathly wise,  
    *Secret somewhere on this earth*  
*Unpermitted Eden lies—*  
    Thus within the world's wide girth  
    Hides she from my spirit's dearth,  
        Paradise  
    Of a love that cries for death.”

When first *The Staff and Scrip* was committed to paper the poem was considerably longer than we now know it, though short of the latter by one verse in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, where it first appeared and where it has many minor points of difference from later editions. Even if it had not been recognisable as an early production from the fact of being published in the *Oxford and Cambridge*, there would be little doubt as to its being more or less contemporary with *The Bride's Prelude*, and the “romantic” period of the artist's career. In the early reading there is one verse, there the nineteenth, beginning, “So, arming, through his soul there pass'd,”—which it seems a pity should have been afterwards omitted ; in all, there are some twenty variations, but as the poem is not a specially important one, however interesting from one point of view, it will be unnecessary to indicate these.

Apart from any other beauty characterising *The Portrait* it is the poem which contains more natural transcripts than any other of anything like equal length by Rossetti. The pathetic first verse is as fine as any—it and the first three lines of the seventh. It

seems to me—but I may be prejudiced—that the following fine lines "from nature" are indirectly due to Tennyson; at least they, especially the three first, are such as one would more readily attribute to the Laureate than to the author of *The House of Life*:—

"Dull rain-drops smote us, and at length  
Thundered the heat within the hills.

The empty pastures blind with rain.

And as I stood there suddenly,  
All wan with traversing the night,  
Upon the desolate verge of light  
Yearned loud the iron-bosomed sea."

On the other hand, the five lines concluding the ninth verse are undoubtedly genuine observation, the same that I have already quoted at least once and which I have elsewhere<sup>1</sup> compared to one of Millet's most successful "impressionist" night-pieces.

*The Card-Dealer*, though in the same metre as *The Bless'd Damsel*, is quite unlike any of the poems that have yet been considered. It has a weird power and significance, and may be said to be amongst Rossetti's poetic work what *How They Met Themselves* is amongst his designs. *A New Year's Burden* is a sad little song, full of subdued feeling, the lament of the lover not being for birth or death but "The love once ours, but ours long ago;" and the same sad strain runs through *An Old Song Ended* and *Even So*, the latter being the finer, though the former is a song, which *Even So* is not, as any one attempting to set the third verse to music for the purpose would discover. The fine eight or

<sup>1</sup> *The Portfolio* (November 1882)—*Pictorialism in Verse*.

nine lines called *Aspecta Medusa* are all that remain, embodied in type instead of on paper or canvas, of the powerful but unfulfilled pictorial design wherein Andromeda beholds in safety "mirrored in the wave that death she lived by."

At the end of the sonnets of *The House of Life*, as they are placed in the 1870, five subsequent and Tauchnitz editions, are eleven lyrics and songs, not one of which is unworthy of special notice. The first is the delicate *Love Lily*, followed by the less lyrical but not less poetic *First Love Remembered*, of which the opening lines suggest the same *motif* as that of the sonnet called *Memorial Thresholds*; the third, *Plighted Promise*, was originally called *Moon Star* (now the title of the twenty-ninth sonnet in *The House of Life*), and is the same already referred to in the last chapter when speaking of Rossetti's work in Gilchrist's *Life of Blake*, when I mentioned that the first four lines had been used by the author as a prose sentence; it is inferior to the others. If *Plighted Promise* is inferior, this cannot be said of *Sudden Light*, which is not only very beautiful but the record of that which happens frequently to many—the sense of antenatal circumstance, or at any rate of actions once before done under similar surroundings, of having seen the same place, seen the same countenance, lived the same moment without having, to one's knowledge, seen hitherto either place or countenance, or experienced exactly the same environment.

"I have been here before,  
But when or how I cannot tell :  
I know the grass beyond the door,  
The sweet keen smell,  
The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.

" You have been mine before,—  
How long ago I may not know :  
But just when at that swallow's soar  
Your neck turned so,  
Some veil did fall,—I knew it all of yore.

" Has this been thus before ?  
And shall not thus Time's eddying flight  
Still with our lives our love restore  
In Death's despite,  
And day and night yield one delight once more ?"

Readers who only have seen or possess the 1870 edition of the *Poems* will notice the great improvement in the third verse, or rather the substitution of the present stanza for that previously in its place. The tender and sorrowful *A Little While* recalls *Even So* and *A New Year's Burden*, but is even more sad and regretful; but the sixth song, *The Song of the Bower*, has the passionate exultation blent with the bitter foreknowledge of one who sees that the present joy of his love will not also fill the future. The throbbing fullness of the music makes it one of Rossetti's most impetuous and most musical lyrics, next to if not equaling what he himself considered his lyric masterpiece, *The Cloud Confines*. *Penumbra* is not a poem that will attract so much at first, its significance not being immediately apparent, but it grows upon the reader till both the music and the meaning blend and become as a strain of plaintive melody. The four so-called songs that follow are amongst the author's finest work—*Woodspurge*, with its acute and (in poetry) newly noted truth, coming first, succeeded by *The Honeysuckle* with its natural beauty and deeper meaning than is at first apprehensible. One line in the latter will "strike



home" any one who has wandered in summer mornings through lanes where the hedges are fragrant with the wild-rose and the trailing deliciousness of the honeysuckle, and noticed, in the poet's words, the latter's "virgin lamps of scent and dew." *A Young Fir Wood* is a fine lyric expression of a philosophic thought, but *The Sea Limits* is such a production as only a poet of a high order could be the author of. It has the mysterious music of the sea in it, "Time's self made audible," the echo of that sound which "since Time was hath told the lapse of time"—a soft understrain like the quiet at the heart of the great universal sea, the quiet which is not of death but of "the mournfulness of ancient life." In the two latter stanzas the voices of nature echo "the same desire and mystery," and even as these so is all mankind at heart, "and Earth, Sea, Man are all in each." The best that has been said regarding the solemn music of *The Sea Limits*, perhaps the best that *could* be said, has been in the words of Mr. Swinburne (*Essays and Studies*). It "has the solemn weight and depth in it of living water, and a sound like the speech of the sea when the wind is silent." It is strange that this poem, than which for mature grasp and beauty nothing by the author is finer, should in composition be almost coeval with *The Blessed Damozel*, having been written about Rossetti's twenty-second year; this early copy, it must however be admitted, is by no means equal (as it appears in the *Germ*) to that so widely known, nor is it of the same length. Its early title is *From the Cliffs: Noon*. Another poem of very early date, probably older than the last-named, is that published in *The Germ* as *Pax Vobis*, and in the 1881 re-issue of *The Poems* as *World's Worth*,

verses decidedly antecedent to such pictorial and akin compositions as *Fra Pace*. There are many variations in the later reading from the earlier, the chief gain being in the terminal lines of each verse; but at times the earlier version seems to me superior, as in those lines describing the desolate monotony of the bleak northern sky as seen from the belfry windows of a Flemish cathedral—

"Passed all the roofs unto the sky  
Whose grayness the wind swept alone"—

though, on the other hand, it only requires the substitution for the *tone* word "gray" for "stark" to make the later reading the superior. The church is St. Bavon in Ghent. Two other poems appear only in the latest issue, namely, *Down Stream* and *Wellington's Funeral*. The first of these is a beautiful and picturesque Thames lyric, but the ode on Wellington's Funeral is as a whole undoubtedly the most unsatisfactory printed poem by Rossetti.

In the *Ballads and Sonnets* are thirteen lyrical pieces, all of great merit and one or two of something more. The first of these, *Soothsay*, may be called, without meaning either disparagement or the reverse, the least *Rossettian* of the poet's compositions; but not so that which follows, which, however, as I drew attention to in a footnote early in this volume, is only to be taken as an experiment in rhythmical echo with only the frailest substratum of poetic *motif*; as such and nothing more is it successful. The beautiful lyrics *Spherical Change* and *Parted Presence* have already been referred to in connection with *Even So* and *A New Year's Burden*, but the intermediary verses are not so

good, defaced as they are by that which has now become wearisome to the last degree, a meaningless refrain—all very well in its right place, which is *not* in a modern poem. A great contrast to *A Death Parting* is *Sunset Wings*, with its fine natural painting, fine despite the making the caws of rooks resemble or suggest “Farewell, no more, farewell, no more;” while the succeeding verses are (with alterations) those intended for the first volume called *Music and Song*. *Three Shadows*, *Adieu*, and *Alas, so Long!* are all fine lyrics, the latter especially; and of a higher order is *Insomnia*, a poem that was certainly born of suffering from the dread scourge that attacks so often the supersensitive nature, and which shortened the life of Rossetti—and in these stanzas is again used, with beautiful effect, the now familiar strain of “Remember and Forget.” There are fine lines in *Possession* and the series concludes with, in the author’s opinion his finest lyric, *The Cloud Confines*. This beautiful composition was first published in *The Fortnightly Review*; but fine as it is to read, only those who have heard its changing cadences half read half chanted by the sonorous voice of the poet himself can know it at its finest.<sup>1</sup>

I will conclude this chapter on those poetical compositions by Rossetti which belong neither to the Sonnet nor the Ballad class, with some highly interesting though crude verses which were the outcome of the visit he paid to Belgium in his early days. They are really more interesting in connection with the *artist* than the *poet*, being written testimony to a well-known fact—his admiration of the realistic and

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Note at end of Chapter.

highly-finished work of Memmeling and Van Eyck.  
The verses are to be found in *The Germ*.

### THE CARILLON.

At Antwerp there is a low wall  
Binding the city, and a moat  
Beneath, that the wind keeps afloat.  
You pass the gates in a slow drawl  
Of wheels. If it is warm at all  
The carillon will give you thought.

I climbed the stair in Antwerp Church,  
What time the urgent weight of sound  
At sunset seems to heave it round.  
Far up, the carillon did search  
The wind ; and the birds came to perch  
Far under, where the gables wound.

At Antwerp harbour on the Scheldt  
I stood along a certain space  
Of night. The mist was near my face :  
Deep on, the flow was heard and felt.  
The carillon kept pause, and dwelt  
In music through the silent place.

At Bruges, when you leave the train  
—A singing numbness in your ears—  
The carillon's first sound appears  
Only an inner moil. Again  
A little minute through—your brain  
Takes quick, and the whole sense hears.

John Memmeling and John Van Eyck  
Hold state at Bruges. In sore shame  
I scanned the works that keep their name.  
The carillon, which then did strike  
Mine ears, was heard of theirs alike :  
It set me closer unto them.

I climbed at Bruges up the flight  
The Belfry has of ancient stone.  
For leagues I saw the east wind blown ;  
The earth was gray, the sky was white.  
I stood so near upon the height  
That my flesh felt the carillon.

(Note to page 350.)

Perhaps the *Cloud-Confiner* (written in 1871, and first published in the *Fortnightly* for January 1882) was suggested by a fine poem by Rossetti's friend George Meredith, which struck the former greatly on its appearance in the *Fortnightly* for August 1870. This was entitled *In the Woods*, and the concluding lines of the first "division" are :—

“ The pine-tree drops its dead ;  
They are quiet under the sea.  
Overhead, overhead,  
Rushes life in a race  
As the clouds the clouds chase ;  
And we go  
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,  
Even we  
Even so.”

## CHAPTER VI.

### BALLADS.

IT may well be doubted if it be possible to write a genuine old-time ballad in these latter days, for the ballad is a poem as much the result of circumstances as an epic. Even if a Homer, a Milton, a Dante were to appear with the regularity of third-rate poetic birth, subjects fit for epic treatment would still be absent—for the wide-embracing scope of the epic leaves little room save for a select and supremely gifted few. Not indeed that I would infer, what is so constantly preached and perhaps believed now as ever since the flower of poetry first sprang from the soil of rude speech, that the day is past wherein it is possible to write a great epic poem; more than one great theme of ancient as well as more than one of comparatively recent or contemporary times awaits the new Homer, Tasso, Ariosto, or Milton, wherever such shall appear: until such appearance it will of course remain the fashion to predict the impossibility. The phase through which our minor poetical literature is passing is one wherein all attention is given to form, and form borrowed from alien literatures, by far the greater portion of it exhibiting an absence of individual and original gift, a mental *ennui* and emotional lassitude that are the signs of the relapse preceding the close of the brilliant Victorian

epoch. Enthusiasm is out of fashion: to have a passionate devotion to nature, to great social or religious ideals, to anything except oneself and one's personal regrets and peculiarly trying spiritual experiences in general—or to trifles of slight if any import—is “bad form.” Pensive meditation on nothing particular takes the place of clarified thought and deep spiritual insight into great problems of life and nature; which after all is but natural, when thought and insight are beyond attainment. The next lustrum is not likely to bring forth much of permanent importance, or even the next decade; but thereafter new voices will make themselves heard, influences now sneered at will be at work, the polished accomplishments of our contemporary minor verse will be generally forgotten, and a larger, fresher, far more widely appealing poetic literature be ushered in with the new age.

As a great epic is not the product of any decade but depends upon special circumstances for fitting production, so a ballad meant to assimilate to the ballads of old cannot well be naturally produced in an environment like that of the present. True ballads are essentially the breath, the intenser life of a nation, and are therefore as much the outcome of general as of individual sentiment: and where ballad poetry is alien from the daily life of a people, it may safely be taken for granted that such poetry is literary and not born of natural instinctive impulse. But because a ballad of the present times cannot with propriety be given in the form of a ballad of the past, it does not follow that ballad literature of all kinds is out of harmony with modern sympathies. It is mere affectation now to write with an archaic diction which would have been

rough and crude in a crude and rough age, but the simplicity of the old folk-lore can be retained, the directness, impersonality, brevity of description, and with these united with natural language and dramatic ability, a true ballad can yet be written; not indeed a ballad full of the savour of lawless border times, but ballads of such life and adventure as might happen to any of us under suitable circumstances. This intensely simple, intensely dramatic poem of the people may still survive in that afterglow of cherished tradition which is almost reality, may still thus survive in the north-western districts and isles of Scotland and Ireland, in Shetland, Iceland, and northern Scandinavia; but whatever else life in or in the neighbourhood of towns may be productive of, it does not nourish the lawless actions and wild freedom that were as breath to the nostrils of our forefathers.

But having dissociated the name from the stirring times of the past, the ballad can still remain a choice form for expression in more than one direction: it can be an historical or legendary poem treated with the simple directness of the old method, or it can be a dramatic lyric, dealing with imaginative creations in place of real personalities and actual facts. In whatever way it be used it must be unindividual, in the sense of betraying the writer's personality, and dramatic in its *motif*, for the ballad belongs neither to lyric poetry nor the drama, but has essential characteristics of either: it partakes of the lyric form but is not a lyric, inasmuch as the latter is the expression of individual life, while a drama is that of the life of others. The ballad then is the lyrically dramatic expression of actions and events in the lives of others.



Of the seven published ballads by Rossetti, three belong to the historical or legendary section, three to the section of individual imaginative creation, and one stands midway betwixt these two sections. The three that more or less accurately conform to ballad requirements are *Stratton Water*, *The King's Tragedy*, and *The White Ship*; those that are so strongly marked by individual characteristics and by general style as to be better embraced by the freer term dramatic lyrics or lyrically dramatic poems, are *Troy Town*, *Eden Bower* and *Rose Mary*, and the seventh is *Sister Helen*.<sup>1</sup>

Reference was made to the last-named splendid and powerful poem in the first chapter, where it will be remembered its date of composition was given as 1851, and where the circumstances connected with its first printed appearance in the *Düsseldorf Magazine* were described. Rossetti at this time (1851) was only twenty-three, yet *Sister Helen* has as firm a grasp and as mature strength as anything from his pen in later life. This powerful and intensely dramatic production differs from any previous poem similar in form in having a burden or refrain varying in slight degree with each verse, the prevailing custom amongst later balladists having been an accompaniment charged with some ominous natural note such as *The willows wail in the waning light*, or else with some absolutely meaningless rhythmical echo, in either case varying not oftener than alternate occurrence. And in the case of *Sister Helen*, it must be confessed a great part of the weird charm it exercises is contained in the accompanying refrain of

<sup>1</sup> To this enumeration should perhaps be added *Dennis Shand*, but as it does not appear amongst the published poems, and as the author in a sense discarded it, no notice of it will be taken.

two lines, varying as the latter does only in the first words of the second line. The central idea of the poem, that of a woman being able to charm away the life of the man she loves or loved by melting a waxen image of him, is not of course original, existing as the legend does in many countries; but in this ballad it has found expression such as it had never hitherto had, with an intensity of feeling, an instinctive grasp of supernatural effect, and a sustained passion of diction that will in all probability assure it its place of permanent unchallenged honour in our literature. Towards the supernatural Rossetti had a special leaning, and in supernatural suggestiveness his poems afford several markedly fine instances; indeed, what I think will yet come to be considered his two chief and noblest compositions, *Sister Helen* and *The King's Tragedy*, are permeated with the supernatural element which was so akin to the inborn mysticism of his own nature. Finely conceived and worked out as was the poem from the first, it has yet undergone great improvement since its composition in 1851, the first decided gain being in the addition of what is now the first verse, which gives at once the clue necessary for immediate understanding. There is no difference between the 1870 and five subsequent editions of *The Poems* and the Tauchnitz version, save that the latter in the third line of the thirty-second verse reads *But Keith of Ewern's sadder still*, instead of *But he and I are sadder still*. The seventeenth verse (1870) is not in the original copy. But very material alterations indeed took place subsequent to its appearance in the Tauchnitz edition, additions which are of great gain in every way, and which were incorporated in the 1881

reissue. It is almost impossible that any one gifted with a spark of imagination could fail to follow in spirit the relentless and triumphant vengeance of the woman who slowly works her lover's death by a gradual melting of his image before a wood-fire's flames, intensified as the passion of such vengeance is by the innocent questions of her little brother and the ominous echo of the burden : carried along in suspense as every reader must be, from the first suggestive lines to the weird ultimate verse—

“ Ah ! what white thing at the door has cross'd,  
Sister Helen ?

Ah ! what is this that sighs in the frost ?”

“ A soul that's lost as mine is lost,  
Little brother !”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
*Lost, lost, all lost between Hell and Heaven !*)

It is scarcely necessary to remark for those who may not have read this splendid and terrible ballad that the first two lines throughout, with the intermediary “ Sister Helen,” are spoken by the little brother, and that in the third line of each verse is condensed each reply of the ruthless woman. As many will only possess the earlier editions, I will add the suggestive and powerful new stanzas embodied in the issue of 1881, pointing out first some minor alterations of the text as it stands up to the latter date. The first four words of the first line of the fourteenth verse are altered to *Three days and nights ; what* is now the first word of the last line of verse 19 ; the third line of the following verse is changed to *In all that his soul sees, there am I*, and the last line in the same to *The soul's one sight ;* the word *joined* takes the place of *more* in the

last line of verse 21 ; and *Not twice to give* is the reading of the last line of the stanza following : in each instance, of course, these numbered verses meaning those of the earlier copies. Between the thirteenth and fourteenth verses the following stanza is inserted :—

“Three days ago, on his marriage-morn,  
   Sister Helen,  
 He sickened, and lies since then forlorn.”  
 “For degroom’s side is the bride a thorn,  
   Little brother !”  
                     (*O Mother, Mary Mother,*  
*Cold bridal cheer, between Hell and Heaven !*)—

an addition that adds point to the bitter mocking response in the succeeding verse—

“Three days and nights he has lain abed,  
   Sister Helen,  
 And he prays in torment to be dead.”  
 “*The thing may chance, if he have prayed,*  
   Little brother !”

The six succeeding stanzas are interpolated between what were the twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth verses :—

“A lady’s here, by a dark steed brought,  
   Sister Helen,  
 So darkly clad, I saw her not.”  
 “See her now, or never see aught,  
   Little brother !”  
                     (*O Mother, Mary Mother,*  
*What more to see, between Hell and Heaven !*)  
 “Her hood falls back, and the moon shines fair,  
   Sister Helen,  
 On the Lady of Ewern’s golden hair.”  
 “Blest hour of my power and her despair,  
   Little brother !”  
                     (*O Mother, Mary Mother,*  
*Hour blest and bann’d between Hell and Heaven !*)

"Pale, pale her cheeks that in pride did glow,

Sister Helen,

'Neath the bridal wreath three days ago."

"One moon for pride, and three days for woe,

Little brother!"

*(O Mother, Mary Mother,*

*Three days, three nights, between Hell and Heaven !)*

"Her clasped hands stretch from her bending head,

Sister Helen,

With the loud wind's wail her sobs are wed."

"What wedding strains hath her bridal bed,

Little brother?"

*(O Mother, Mary Mother,*

*What strains but death's, between Hell and Heaven ?)*

"She may not speak, she sinks in a swoon,

Sister Helen,

She lifts her lips and gasps on the moon."

"Oh ! might I but hear her soul's blithe tune,

Little brother!"

*(O Mother, Mary Mother,*

*Her woe's dumb cry, between Hell and Heaven !)*

"They've caught her to Westholm's saddle-bow,

Sister Helen,

And her moonlit hair gleams white in its flow."

"Let it turn whiter than winter snow,

Little brother!"

*(O Mother, Mary Mother,*

*Woe-withered gold, between Hell and Heaven !)*

To these succeed the stanzas beginning with that which in the early editions would be numbered twenty-nine—

"O Sister Helen, you heard the bell,

Sister Helen !" etc.,

with only one interpolation, namely that coming between verses 31 and 32:—

"Flank to flank are the three steeds gone,  
Sister Helen,  
But the lady's dark steed goes alone."  
"And lonely her bridegroom's soul hath flown,  
Little brother."  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
The lonely ghost, between Hell and Heaven !)

The three ballads which I have preferred to characterise as lyrically dramatic poems, *Troy Town*, *Eden Bower*, and *Rose Mary*, were all written about the same period, namely, between 1869 and 1872, though the last named was both materially altered and added to in later years.

*Troy Town* was composed in the autumn of 1869 while residing at Penkill Castle, where it will be remembered Rossetti also wrote *The Stream's Secret*, and for a long time it was one of the author's favourite ballads. Of late, however, he certainly did not hold this opinion. The poem is a fine one of its kind, the last five stanzas especially; but it seems to me to have been hitherto overrated in importance. It is full indeed of the passionate emotion which we would at once associate with the prayer of Helen to Venus, but the passion is of such a purely physical kind that the wanton *abandon* of the wife of Menelaus has a somewhat unpleasant savour of mere animalism. What is fitting in a Lilith or a Lamia repels in the mother of Hermione. Physical passion in its right place is far from being either undesirable or unartistic, but such a verse, for instance, as the ninth of *Troy Town* has a fault very characteristic of much of our contemporary poetry, namely, a meaningless excess in expression. The burden of this poem,

(*O Troy's down,  
Tall Troy's on fire !*)

is in thorough harmony with the *motif*, prophetic as it is of the terrible outcome of the love of "heaven-born Helen, Sparta's queen" for the wily son of Priam.

A much more powerful and notable ballad is that called *Eden Bower*. It deals with the well-known legend of Lilith, the wife of Adam before the creation of Eve; a subject that had many years before the composition of the poem appealed powerfully to Rossetti's imagination, and which it will be remembered he made the central idea of one of his most striking pictures. In a sense the painting is more original than the poem, the artist having represented Lilith as no nude or witch-like companion of Adam, but as a woman of our own and all time, an embodiment of the animal nature in man, ceaselessly craving and remorseless wherever its fascination becomes all potent. In the picture we see her, as described in the sonnet written for the design, in her immortal youth, still as of yore drawing men "to watch the bright net she can weave, till heart and body and life are in its hold;" clothed in soft white furs, and with a mirror before her in which she gazes "subtly of herself contemplative." The pictorial conception is an especially subtle and original one, and one which only a great painter could have adequately carried out; and though the poem is in exact keeping with the witch-legend, it is hardly less original. It is not an invention, which Keats took to be the polar star of poetry, but it is an old conception embodied afresh, a general truth seen through the veil of individual insight and imagination.

*Eden Bower* was begun a week or so later than

*Troy Town*, and was thoroughly matured in the author's mind before the first stanza was committed to paper: like the latter, it was thought out and some preliminary experimentive verses were written at Penkill Castle. But the first fourteen stanzas, as they now stand, were composed at the house of a friend near Carlisle, at which Rossetti had to stay a day on his return to London owing to being unable to get on to London on a Sunday. The following note to Mr. W. B. Scott at Penkill Castle is of interest as more definitely fixing the date of its composition, the note being written in the last week of September though undated:—

"16 CHEYNE WALK, *Tuesday*.

"Here I am since 9.30 last night after a very dragging journey. On Saturday there was a stay of an hour and a half at Ayr and I reached Carlisle about 7.30, and thence made my way to Miss Losh's. I could not get forward on Sunday, so stayed at Ravenside, and there wrote some fourteen stanzas of my *Lilith* poem, which I think will be a good one. If not falling so easy into shape as *Troy Town*, and turning out necessarily rather longer, I nevertheless found it yield ample suggestions for a central representative treatment of its splendid subject. I call it *Eden Bower*, and will send you a copy if finished soon, as I daresay it will be in a day or two. I suppose I shall put it in print at once."

It is of greater length than the author evidently anticipated, extending as it does to forty-nine stanzas. The story of *Lilith*, of whom it is told,

"That, ere the snake's, her sweet tongue could deceive,  
And her enchanted hair was the first gold"—

has all the significance of that of *Lamia*, but it both contains and is narrated with much more dramatic effect. The portion of the legend chosen by Rossetti



is not that of the loves of Lilith and Adam before the creation of Eve but subsequent thereto, and neither the father nor mother of the human race are introduced in the poem as speakers : the scene being some grove outside of Eden, where unseen of our first parents Adam's first wife tempts the Snake and exults with the latter in fierce prospective joy of their own love when Adam and Eve shall be fallen from their high estate. Though once a snake herself, and the fairest of all, she was changed after the creation of Adam into the human shape,

“ Not a drop of her blood was human,  
But she was made like a soft sweet woman ”—

so that she has all the passions that go to make life hell or heaven. But after the creation of Eve she was driven from Eden, and though she loves as passionately as Adam the snake who was her first mate, she cannot forgive the more human loveliness called Eve who has usurped her place : so, looking upon the happiness of the latter and Adam from where she stands on the skirts of Eden, she appeals to the Snake to aid her and to accept again the gift of her passion, an appeal blent with fierce and exultant memories of her lost wifedom. It is at this point that *Eden Bower* commences. But scarcely are her first passionate words addressed to the Snake—

“ Take me thou as I come from Adam :  
Once again shall my love subdue thee ;  
The past is past and I am come to thee ”—

ere the bitter memory of past joys makes her recur again to the days now lost to her for ever—

- "O but Adam was thrall to Lilith !  
All the threads of my hair are golden,  
And there in a net his heart was holden.
- "O and Lilith was queen of Adam !  
All the day and the night together  
My breath could shake his soul like a feather.
- "What great joys had Adam and Lilith !—  
Sweet close rings of the serpent's twining,  
As heart in heart lay sighing and pining.
- "What bright babes had Lilith and Adam !—  
Shapes that coiled in the woods and waters,  
Glittering sons and radiant daughters."

Then she makes a wild appeal to the Snake to help her in her revenge, offering him in reward her eternal love. And what she asks is that he will lend her his shape if but for an hour, so that she may tempt and destroy the human creatures to whom God forbade the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The verses following are charged with intense and dramatic feeling, verses wherein we are told how Lilith dwells upon the deception which will prove successful, and which culminate in an exultantly-remorseless address to Eve—

- "Know, thy path is known unto Lilith !  
While the blithe birds sang at thy wedding,  
There her tears grew thorns for thy treading.
- "O my love, thou Love-snake of Eden !  
O to-day and the day to come after !  
Loose me, love,—give breath to my laughter !  
.  
.  
.  
.  
.  
.
- "With cries of 'Eve!' and 'Eden!' and 'Adam !'  
How shall we mingle our love's caresses,  
I in thy coils, and thou in my tresses !"

With the introduction of the prophetic element a deeper and stronger note still is struck—

“Where the river goes forth to water the garden,  
The springs shall dry and the soil shall harden.

“Yea, where the bride-sleep fell upon Adam,  
None shall hear when the storm-wind whistles  
Through roses choked among thorns and thistles.

“Yea, beside the east-gate of Eden,  
Where God joined them and none might sever,  
The sword turns this way and that for ever.”

The poem concludes with Lilith's fierce and triumphant promise to the Snake regarding the two children of Adam and Eve—

“The first is Cain and the second Abel :  
The soul of one shall be made thy brother,  
And thy tongue shall lap the blood of the other !”

More charged as it is with passionate feeling than *Troy Town*, it seems to me in every way a finer poem, the serpentine passion of Lilith being in thorough harmony with the conception of Adam's witch wife, and the *abandon* of the whole throughout having the true naturalism of instinctive creation. The refrain, varying alternately with each verse from *Eden bower's in flower* to *And O the bower and the hour !* is by no means of such value as that accompanying the stanzas of *Sister Helen*, yet it adds greatly to the effect of lyrical emotion caused by the chant-like cadences of *Eden Bower*.

*Rose Mary* is one of the longest of Rossetti's poems, and as a poem is not only full of beauty but also thoroughly characteristic of the author's genius. But it is not a ballad, either in simple directness of diction

or clarity of outline. The form of verse chosen by the author was one specially suited to the subject, allowing as it does such scope for effective endings to highly-wrought emotional passages, namely an octosyllabic couplet followed by an octosyllabic triplet with one rhyme sound. The story hinges upon the magic properties of a Beryl-stone, wherein passing and coming events can be imaged to the man or woman who looks therein if he or she be pure in heart and life; but evil spirits can also enter into its sphere through a Christian's sin, so that if one not pure in life looks into it the Beryl becomes possessed by these, and only the apparent semblance of truth is visible to the seeker and the reverse of what ultimately happens is imaged forth. Rose Mary is the name of her who is betrothed to Sir James of Heronhay, and with her mother awaits the coming of the knight; but the mother has heard of an ambush to take away his life, yet knows not the name of the secret foe or the time or place. The poem opens with her calling her daughter in from the gathering dusk, and bidding her read again for her own need the Beryl-stone whose mysteries her childish eyes had last deciphered; and while she tells Rose Mary that Sir James rides to Holy Cross at break of day in order to find shrift for some past sin ere the wedding take place, she breaks also to her the rumour of the peril that awaits him. A premonition of misfortune comes upon Rose Mary, whose white lips mutter as she sinks at her mother's feet, "The night will come if the day is o'er." But the mother knows nothing of the secret that makes the news of more bitter omen than any rumour of ambush, the secret that none knows save Sir James of Heron-

hayes and the girl who yielded to him all that she had to give: so she tells her daughter to take heart for she will yet be a bride even as she is now a maid, and at the same time takes from her "jewelled zone" the mystic Beryl "shaped to a shadowy sphere," of which a beautiful description is given in the following verses:—

"With shuddering light 'twas stirred and strewn  
Like the cloud-nest of the wading moon:  
Freaked it was as the bubble's ball,  
Rainbow-hued through a misty pall  
Like the middle light of the waterfall.

. . . . .  
A thousand years it lay in the sea  
With a treasure wrecked from Thessaly;  
Deep it lay 'mid the coiled sea-wrack,  
But the ocean-spirits found the track:  
A soul was lost to win it back."

She then relates to Rose Mary again how her lord brought the stone from Palestine, and how after the sacred sign of the cross was made over it all the accursed multitude of evil spirits who haunted it as a Moslem amulet were driven forth, never again to enter it save by a Christian's sin: and how "all last night at an altar fair" she had prayed for holy help and burned strange fires of potent influence, till now the spell lacked nothing save the sinless eyes of a maiden. Rose Mary would fain not look, but at last does so

"And stretched her thrilled throat passionately,  
And sighed from her soul, and said, 'I see.'

"Even as she spoke, they two were 'ware  
Of music notes that fell through the air;

A chiming shower of strange device,  
Drop echoing drop, once twice and thrice,  
As rain may fall in Paradise.

"An instant come, in an instant gone,  
No time there was to think thereon.  
The mother held the sphere on her knee :—  
'Lean this way and speak low to me,  
And take no note but of what you see.'"

Rose Mary then narrates the vision imaged in the Beryl-sphere, namely two roads that part in a waste country, and a narrow glen running between dark hill-slopes and opening on a river in whose marshy margins the stiff blue sedge alone grows. Then the mother asks if there is any roof in sight that might shelter the treacherous foe, or if there is any boat lurking amongst the reeds, but to these questions Rose Mary replies that there is only a herdsman's hut, and that the only boat is one oared by a peasant woman and steered by a young child: but at last with a shuddering cry the damsel clings close to her mother's knees, for close to the broken floodgates of a ruined weir she spies the glint of the spears, and on forcing herself to look again she makes out eight men hidden from the pathway by willow-boughs, and of a sudden she makes out from the wind-stirred pennon that the chief of these men is the Warden of Holy-leugh. This is so far good news to both watchers, for now at least they know the name of Heronhay's foe and what the peril is that awaits him by Waris-weir, but the mother fears that further ambush may for deadlier certainty await the coming knight upon the hill-track far above, so she tells Rose Mary to look again: but the latter sees nothing that is sus-

picious along the whole track from the hill-slopes to the farthest hill-clefts beyond which the great walls of the castle of Holycheugh loom like a cloud-shadow. The mother then knows that all is well, as the one danger can be averted ; so she replaces the Beryl-stone in her robe, and as she does so a soft music "rained through the room ;"

"Low it splashed like a sweet star-spray,  
And sobbed like tears at the heart of May,  
And died as laughter dies away."

Shortly after this the first part is finished, and between it and the second comes the first of the three Beryl-Songs. But the long-debarred evil spirits have entered it, and their chant, though unheard of either mother or daughter, makes the reader aware that the spell has not only misled Rose Mary but is also therein the cause of her death. With Part II. we soon discern that the mother knows the daughter is not indeed the sinless maiden she had thought, yet her love is not dissipated thereby, and while Rose Mary looks to the end of the three days when Sir James of Heronhaye will come with saving love, she looks also to his arrival as that which will result in the redemption of her child's honour. There is a fine image following upon those verses describing how the flood-gates of restraint are broken down by mutual tears and love and anxiety—

"Closely locked, they clung without speech,  
*And the mirrored souls shook each to each,*  
*As the cloud-moon and the water-moon*  
*Shake face to face when the dim stars swoon*  
In stormy bowers of the night's mid-noon."

Then the mother tells her daughter how her sin had

prevented her seeing aright, and that the ambush lay not by the ruined weir but in the last of the seven clefts of the hill near Holycleugh where she had seen but a faint mountain-mist, and that from thence the dead had just been borne home. Then succeed the powerful verses describing the shock and the grief that overwhelm the unfortunate girl, how that the ceaseless pulse of the ocean itself is calm

"To the prisoned tide of doom set free  
In the breaking heart of Rose Mary."

She springs to her feet in sudden agony, as the heifer springs when it feels the wolf's teeth at its throat, but with a shriek falls back in an unconscious swoon:—

"In the hair dark-waved the face lay white  
As the moon lies in the lap of night ;  
And as night through which no moon may dart  
Lies on a pool in the woods apart,  
So lay the swoon on the weary heart."

After the mother has done what she can to restore, Rose Mary she bids the priest attend and comfort the latter, and herself goes alone to the chamber where lies the slain body of him whose name of Heronhay was in three days to have been her daughter's also, and she finds him stretched on his bier with torn and bloodied garments and with features still clenched in the wrath of the fight. She looks upon the man who has now brought shame as well as sorrow to her and hers, but forgiving words come to her lips as she murmurs to herself that if he had lived he would have even yet been their "honour's strong security." Hoping that Heaven may be as merciful despite his having died without the shrift he sought, she stoops



to kiss the brow of Sir James, but in doing so notices, half-hid in the riven vest, a packet dyed in the life-blood that has clotted upon the pale skin of the dead man. She lifts this, thinking it some betrothal gift of her daughter, but on opening it she finds a written paper and in it a lock of golden hair. The hair of Rose Mary was dark, and a terrible doubt flashes across the mother's mind. She reads the paper, which is signed "Jocelind," whom she knows to be the sister of the Warden of Holycleugh, and from which she learns that Sir James of Heronhay has been false to Rose Mary. All the forgiveness, all the pity, have gone now, and she only sees in the dead man the cowardly and base betrayer of her daughter, and she spurns his body with all the scorn and hate of a wronged woman :—

"She lifted the lock of gleaming hair  
And smote the lips and left it there.  
'Here's gold that Hell shall take for thy toll!  
Full well hath thy treason found its goal,  
O thou dead body and damnèd soul!"

Close upon this the second part concludes with the priest hastening with word that Rose Mary has disappeared and is nowhere to be found. Then comes the second chorus of the Beryl-spirits, prophetic of further sorrow still. The third part opens with some beautiful stanzas descriptive of Rose Mary with the clouded mind which is the result of the shock of her great grief, clouded from the moment she awoke from the swoon of that fatal night :—

"The dawn broke dim on Rose Mary's soul,—  
No hill-crown's heavenly aureole,  
But a wild gleam on a shaken shoal."

She passes in by the secret panel her mother had left open by mistake, and comes at last to the underground altar-cell, which is described with weird imaginative richness; she there pays no heed to what would at another time be so strange and new to her, but pulls aside the altar-veil, whereafter she sees the Beryl-stone poised between the hollowed wings of an unknown sculptured beast. The sight of the Beryl, so fatal to her and him whom she had loved, is like the lightning flash that disperses the darkness of the night, and in a moment her mind is clear again, but only clear to suffer the agonies that memory brings in its train. At last she takes her father's sword, which she spies near at hand, and cleaves the Beryl in twain that it may work no more evil upon the earth. The verses describing what follows are exceedingly fine, and the indescribable horror and tumult of the dispersed spirit's shrieks and wailings are splendidly suggested in the antecedent stanzas, which conjure up terrible imaginings of dreadful and ominous sound. But the primal spirit of the Beryl is at hand, and speaks saving words of comfort to Rose Mary ere her face grows cold as well as pale in death. The poem concludes with the parting wailing chorus of the Beryl-spirits.

Altogether *Rose Mary* is a powerful and beautiful poem, charged with that supernatural element so characteristic of the author at his best and sustained throughout at an equable pitch, only rising to intenser notes with the urgent wave of emotion or passion of dramatic climax. As a ballad it is not so fine as *The King's Tragedy*, as a work of art it is superior; and its sonorous and strongly-coloured stanzas will

continue favourites with all lovers of poetry as long as the name of Dante Gabriel Rossetti holds its place in English literature. The least successful portions of the poem are the Beryl-Songs, the rapid lyrical measures of which are at once forced and unfitting; but it is doing no less than justice to this magnificent poem and to its author to say that the Beryl-Songs were an afterthought and an excrescence. A friend (Mr. Theodore Watts), on reading through the entire volume of *Ballads and Sonnets* previously to its being placed in the printer's hands, made the remark that the story of Rose Mary was not presented with sufficient simplicity and clarity for the sluggish apprehension of the general reader. Rossetti brooded as was usual over any objection coming from that quarter, and on Mr. Watts seeing him again after an absence in the country Rossetti produced the Beryl-Songs (in type) as being intended to knit the different portions of the story together. Mr. Watts, though struck with the ingenuity and novelty of their metrical structure, declared against them, and used the unluckily disparaging remark that "they turned a fine ballad into a bastard opera." Rossetti was so much distressed and depressed at this, and he was so ill at the time, that his friend withdrew his objection, or at least greatly modified it; and the impression was struck off. But, afterwards, Rossetti himself found that the songs were a mistake and said that, in a future edition, he should remove them from the body of the poem. I am of opinion that this should be done now.

Of the three poems which most distinctively belong to the Ballad class, *Stratton Water* is the most successful as an experiment. Yet even this ballad, fine

as it is in itself and charged as it is with the old-time flavour, is as unmistakably the work of a later as *Burd Helen* is of an older balladist, and still more is this the case in its present published form, materially altered and, as a ballad, not improved as this is from the original manuscript, and even from the first proofs of 1869. It now extends to about forty verses, the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth of which, amongst others, were subsequent alterations. As I have had occasion to remark in the third chapter, Rossetti very rarely indeed improved any drawing or picture after any interval of time, and though the reverse is as a rule the case in his poetical compositions, there are several instances in which the second or ultimate touch, accompanied by the tendency to over-elaboration, has detracted from rather than added to the value of the work. And if this was the case with such thoroughly individual compositions as some of the sonnets, still more was it so in ballad-work: in a word, the value of the first impulse is greater in the latter than the former, and hence subsequent handling less likely to be productive of advantage. I do not doubt if Rossetti had lived ten years longer, and a re-issue of the *Ballads and Sonnets* were then to appear, that *The King's Tragedy* would be found to have some very material alterations, structurally and in additions, which would be very unlikely to be improvements. He himself considered *Stratton Water* successful only in so far as any imitation of the old ballad can be successful, but within this degree he believed it to be as good as anything of the kind by any living writer; though he believed, what no doubt many will agree with, that the poem in ballad form which contains

the most subtle essence of poetic beauty since Keats' *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, is that *chef-d'œuvre* of Sydney Dobell, *Keith of Ravelston*. Amongst other differences in the unpublished readings, one seems to me decidedly superior: the fifth verse, it will be remembered, runs thus—

“What's yonder far below that lies  
So white against the slope?  
'Oh it's a sail o' your bonny barks  
The waters have washed up.'”

while the earlier version is as follows—

“*What thing is yon that shines so white  
Against the hither slope?*  
'O it's a sail o' your bonny barks  
The waters have washed up.'”

*The White Ship* is as simply constructed as *Stratton Water*, and perhaps on the whole may even be said to transcend the latter as a ballad, though as an experiment its form is not so successful. Looking on it as the ballad of Berold, the butcher of Rouen, there are one or two incongruities, *i.e.* individualisms of style of which the author has been unable to divest himself; such, for instance, as,

“the king was 'ware  
Of a little boy with golden hair,  
As bright as the golden poppy is  
*That the beach breeds for the surf to kiss;*”

but such are the exception, and the *The White Ship* must take its place as one of the best constructed, least laboured, and most direct of Rossetti's poems. As a poem it is not equal to *Rose Mary*, as a poem and ballad in one it does not attain the supreme level of

*The King's Tragedy*; but it is *The White Ship*, and as *The White Ship* it must be taken into consideration and judged, and not by this or that poem dealing with more or less alien subjects. This ballad was written in 1880, nominally for the children of Mr. and Mrs. William Rossetti; and very probably most children, as well as most of their elders, are familiar with the story of King Henry I. going over to France to claim the Norman allegiance, which accomplished, he and the Prince and all with them arranged to return to England in time for the Christmas festivities; and how the Prince and Princess and three hundred others embarked on the 25th of November in the year 1120 on the *White Ship* commanded by Fitz-Stephen, the hereditary royal pilot; and how the vessel sank midway, and the English Prince and Princess and their retinue and all the men-at-arms were drowned out of sight of the rest of the fleet, which had started many hours previously and safely arrived. The narrative is told in the ballad by "the butcher of Rouen, poor Berold," sole survivor out of the three hundred who set sail so merrily from Harfleur. Midway the vessel is pierced by a sunken reef and rapidly settles into the trough of the short leaping waves. Berold then relates how the prince, cruel and of ill-conditioned habits in his life, dies like the man he had not hitherto proved himself to be, and this in despite

"Of all England's bended knee,  
And maugre the Norman fealty!"

dies, because

"*The sea hath no king but God alone!*"

The lines describing the shipwreck and the drowning

sensations of Berold are full of power and force. Suddenly Berold finds his arms grasping the mainyard, and upon it another like himself thus saved from immediate death, and the next moment a third clutches the saving spar. This last is Fitz-Stephen, whose first question is for the Prince, and who, on hearing of his fate, looses his hold and sinks back in the sea. At last Berold's knightly companion feels his strength gone, and, bidding farewell, falls back from the spar and is seen no more; while the butcher of Rouen drifts alone upon the chill salt sea till he becomes unconscious, and wakes to find himself in a fisher-boat. Then the narrative proceeds to relate how the news was broken to the dreaded lord of England and Normandy—

“ But this King never smiled again.”

A poem, no one can doubt after perusal, that is destined to have an honoured place in every future selection of notable English ballads.

Not only ranking first amongst his ballad-work, but also in the opinion of himself and many others, Rossetti's *magnum opus* is also one of his latest compositions, a fact that adds greatly to the painful significance of his early death, for those who knew him best knew how stored his mind was with subjects for future use. Scottish history had a special fascination for him, and shortly before he went for health's sake in the autumn of 1881 to Cumberland he asked me to find out for him any particulars as to Alexander III. not mentioned in ordinary histories of Scotland. It was either during the composition of *The King's Tragedy* or when first hearing it read as a whole that

it flashed upon me what a splendid subject for Rossetti the death-ride of Alexander III. would be; and on my suggesting this, and narrating to him the facts he had forgotten, he expressed the determination to write a ballad on the subject whenever he felt his strength equal to the task. This and another famous incident in Scottish history he frequently referred to, and looked forward to chronicling in verse. He had a great admiration for *The King's Quhair*, which he first read in 1869 when staying at Penkill Castle in Ayrshire, where Mr. W. B. Scott was busy with the mural decorations illustrative of the poem and which now flank the double staircase; and greatly as he admired the famous poem he had a still greater admiration for James of Scotland himself, whom he regarded as the greatest prince these islands have seen but born out of his due time. So it is not to be wondered at that the task he had set himself to accomplish being a labour of love he should have succeeded so well that his principal ballad ranks also as his best poem.

The subject of *The King's Tragedy* is so well known that a recapitulation is hardly necessary. Rossetti's ballad is supposed to be narrated by the Catherine Douglas who, subsequent to the murder of James, became known as Kate Barlass from the fact of her having barred the door of the royal chamber with her arm in lieu of the bolt that had been treacherously withdrawn. She, now an old woman, is narrating to her grandchildren, it may be, and their friends the famous story which beseeching lips have won from her again and again, and begins, as doubtless long accustomed, by referring to the arm itself and what it has done in outdoor sport and indoor gaiety, how it has been the



rest for a true lord's head and the cradle for many a babe, and, chiefest honour of all, "bar to a king's chambère." Having told her hearers all that led to the raising of the siege of Roxburgh Castle, the return of the King to Edinburgh, and the first successful quelling of the mutinous barons, she goes on to narrate how the King commanded that at Christmastide a solemn festival should be held in the Charterhouse of Perth, and how he and all his household rode away northwards for the purpose. At the end of the first stage, and just as the wintry sun has disappeared, they reach the Fife seaboard, and here an imminent storm is well described, albeit the opening lines are too "Rossettian," or rather too laboured for a poem that was meant to emulate in simplicity and directness of speech the ballads of old. Powerful and beautiful as are the following lines—

"That eve was clenched for a boding storm,  
'Neath a toilsome moon half seen ;  
The cloud stooped low and the surf rose high ;  
And where there was a line of the sky,  
Wild wings loomed dark between."

they have not the simple directness of the noble old ballad of *Sir Patrick Spens*—

"I saw the new moon late yestreen,  
Wi' the auld moon in her arm.

. . . . .

They hadna sailed a league, a league,  
A league but barely three,  
When the lift grew dark and the wind blew loud,  
And gurly grew the sea."

It is the difference between art and nature. Following upon this come some verses of great beauty

and weird imagination ; those, namely, describing the haggard woman with the gift of the second sight. They see something in the shadowy distance apparently instinct with life and beside a rock on the black beach—

“ And was it only the tossing furze,  
Or brake of the waste sea-wold ?  
Or was it an eagle bent to the blast ? ”

but on the King drawing nigh he discovers only an old and haggard woman in tattered garments—old, however, only in appearance, for on seeing James she springs erect as though “ her writhen limbs were wrung by a fire within,” and in the sudden light given by the moon sailing clear of the cloud-rack she is seen to be gaunt and strong. The King seems known to her, for she greets him at once in strange weird words. Here was one of those opportunities for supernatural effect which Rossetti could not have let slip and which he has taken splendid advantage of : the following verses being steeped in the supernatural *aura* as thunder-clouds are charged with electricity :—

“ And the woman held his eyes with her eyes :—  
‘ O King, thou art come at last ;  
But thy wraith has haunted the Scottish sea  
To my sight for four years past.

“ Four years it is since first I met,  
’Twixt the Duchray and the Dhu,  
A shape whose feet clung close in a shroud,  
And that shape for thine I knew.

“ A year again, and on Inchkeith Isle  
I saw thee pass in the breeze,  
With the cerecloth risen above thy feet,  
And wound about thy knees.

- “ And yet a year, in the Links of Forth,  
As a wanderer without rest,  
Thou cam’st with both thine arms i’ the shroud  
That clung high up thy breast.
- “ And in this hour I find thee here,  
And well mine eyes may note  
That the winding-sheet hath passed thy breast  
And risen around thy throat.
- “ And when I meet thee again, O King,  
That of death hast such sore drouth,—  
Except thou turn again on this shore,—  
The winding-sheet shall have moved once more,  
And covered thine eyes and mouth.’”

The King, however, refuses to turn back, but with noble and resigned resolve determines to pursue his journey. The scene shortly after changes to the Charterhouse of Perth, on a wind-wild eve in February ; and some twenty-five verses are devoted to a beautiful description of the twain who in marriage had not ceased to be lovers. On the other hand, it seems to me that nothing has been gained by the altered stanzas of *The King's Quhair* as sung by James, the beauty of the original being spoiled and the clipped version unsatisfactory : it would have been better either to have given the stanzas in their own shape, despite that not being akin to the ballad form, or else to have condensed them to four-line octosyllabic verses not in quotation but by the writer. But the peace of the King is broken by the news that the woman who had prophesied to him on the bleak sea-shore demands to see him again, yet he will not permit this for fear he should alarm the Queen. After the royal lovers retire the traitorous Robert Stuart removes the locks and the bolts, but the waiting-women of the queen

notice nothing, though there is an eery wail in the wind outside and something ominous in the way in which

"The shadows cast on the arras'd wall  
'Mid the pictured kings stood sudden and tall,  
Like spectres sprung from the ground."

As the King and Queen lie together at rest they are suddenly startled by a wild shrill voice crying strange words under their chamber window, and they recognise the voice as the same that once prophesied to them by the Scottish sea. And now the King is told it is too late, or almost too late, for the mystic shroud she has watched year by year extending from feet to arms covers his eyes and mouth, the prophetic wail and appeal ending in the following magnificent stanza, lines which no living or recent poet has surpassed in weird imaginativeness and supernatural effect :—

"For every man on God's ground, O King,  
His death grows up from his birth  
In a shadow-plant perpetually ;  
And thine towers high, a black yew-tree,  
O'er the Charterhouse of Perth !"

But the repeated warning has come too late, and Sir Robert Graeme and his fellow-traitors have gained access to the royal apartments. At the appeal of the Queen and Catherine Douglas the unarmed and betrayed King springs down into a vault beneath, foul and confined but the only possible refuge, and while the Queen sees to the removing the traces of the torn plank which had been displaced, Catherine Douglas, as she herself is narrating, springs to the door as she hears the tread of armed men approaching and in

despair thrusts her arm through the stanchions that had once held the iron bar. One crash, however, and the arm is shattered and entrance gained. Then follows the horrible tragedy of the King's murder, after a brief space wherein the women thought to have deceived the traitors, which indeed they might have succeeded in doing had it not been for the traitor-chamberlain, Robert Stuart.

The narrator of the ballad goes on to tell how vengeance was at last accomplished, and *The King's Tragedy* concludes with the bitter thought of Queen Jane,—

“That a poet true and a friend of man,

. . . . .  
Should needs be born a king !”

Brief as this account of the important ballad-section of Rossetti's poetic work has been, it may serve to show that his fame as a poet is not based alone upon his sonnets, that indeed it comprises compositions upon which his name will probably rest when many of the sonnets have ceased to charm any save the rare cultivated ear and the poetic student.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE SONNET—SONNETS FOR PICTURES—MISCELLANEOUS SONNETS.

“ Apart from all sanctions, the student of poetry knows that no form of verse is a surer touchstone of mastery than this, which is so easy to write badly, so supremely difficult to write well, so full both of hindrance and of occasion in all matters of structure and of style ; neither any a more searching test of inspiration, since on the one hand it seems to provoke the affectations of ingenuity, and on the other hand it has been chosen by the greatest men of all as the medium for their most intimate, direct, and overwhelming self-disclosures.”—*The Westminster Review*, 1871.

“ Parmi les auteurs modernes de sonnets en Angleterre, M. Rossetti a droit à la première place. Pour trouver les mêmes qualités que dans ses ouvrages, il faut s'adresser aux sonnets de Shakespeare, de Milton, ou de Wordsworth. L'influence des modèles Italiens sur l'auteur se fait fortement sentir, et l'intensité de la passion se mêle chez lui à une austérité qui vient directement du Dante. Comme magnificence de langage, la littérature Anglaise moderne n'a rien qui égale ces poèmes.”—*Le Livre*, 10 Décembre, 1881.

If it were practicable at this advanced stage to go into detail on so interesting a subject as the Sonnet, I should willingly have done so, both because of Rossetti's connection with this form of literature and because a markedly widespread interest has of late been re-awakened and seems still increasing in sonnet-expression, but the exigencies of space imperatively forbid

my doing so. A few prefatory remarks, however, seem necessary.

The two quotations at the head of this chapter strike the keynote of the remaining portion of this book: that from the *Westminster Review* stating concisely the position the sonnet holds as a vehicle of poetic expression, and that from *Le Livre* the position Dante Gabriel Rossetti occupies in sonnet-literature. It is hardly necessary to call to mind that this form has been a favourite one with poets for hundreds of years, and that some of the greatest writers of our own and other lands have chosen it for personal revelation in preference to any other metrical arrangement: we at once recall how Laura's memory and Petrarca's love are embalmed in the three hundred and fifteen sonnets comprised in the *In Vita* and the *In Morte di M. Laura*; how the beautiful and unfortunate Gaspara Stampa, whom Titian and Tintoretto and others of her famous contemporaries considered the Italian Sappho, enshrined in burning words her love for the Lord of Collalto; how Shakespeare used the sonnet as a key to unlock his heart and inner life; how Mrs. Browning embodied in an imperishable series the passion and devotion of a woman's love. Yet it is strange that this form, so widely used in English literature alone and known to be worthy by the guarantee of such names as Spenser, Drummond, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Keats, Hartley Coleridge, Mrs. Browning, Tennyson-Turner, Christina Rossetti, Dante Rossetti, and others of the past and present, should be so little apprehended as to its externals and its essentials, by the average reader of poetic literature, that it is doubtful if even yet a majority of such readers would at

once be able to realise or to state that the sonnet is a poem of invariably fourteen decasyllabic lines with understood artificial rhyme-arrangement—still more doubtful if such would at once apprehend the differences between the Shakespearian structure, the Miltonic, and the Petrarchan.  $\angle$

Yet differences so essential can be comprised within this limited compass of fourteen lines, that some authorities would go the length of denying the name of sonnet to many poems so called altogether. Before briefly specifying the points of divergence between the leading sonnet-structures I may state that there seems to me but one cardinal law affecting the sonnet, and that is that every sonnet must be the intensified expression of one emotion or one thought, and that whenever more than one thought or one emotion is introduced, or whenever the expression is not intensified to concise, direct, and immediate relation with the *motif* it ceases to be a sonnet. “*The sonnet is a moment’s monument;*” if it is not “a moment’s monument” it might as well be styled “Lines,” or “Quatrains,” or a “Stanza.” I confess that if a sonnet satisfies me on this point its rhyme-arrangement matters to me little, though I fully admit that the sensitive ear recognises at once the value of an octave with only two rhymes and a sestet with three as a maximum.  $\angle$  This latter musical and *instinctively* agreeable rhyme-arrangement once accepted, it seems to me there is but one material point of divergence worth discussing—namely, whether, as a rule, the dictum of Keats is the better—

“The sonnet, swelling loudly  
Up to its climax, and then dying proudly;



or whether the Petrarchan form, as formulated by Mr. Theodore Watts, is the more preferable. Personally, I believe as much in the instinctive choice of emotion as I do in poetic creation only on the stirrings of strong impulse; therefore, if the arrangement suits the emotion, I am not offended by a concluding rhymed couplet, or by the quatrains used to such purpose by Shakespeare, Drayton, and Tennyson-Turner.<sup>1</sup>

The first recognisable aspect of the sonnet is that it is invariably neither more nor less than fourteen decasyllabic lines in length. It is needless at present to inquire why this number of lines should be chosen in preference to twelve, thirteen, or fifteen, or any arbitrary election, why these lines should be decasyllabic, and why the octave should have only two rhyme-sounds and the sestet two or three; the answer has already been given authoritatively in an authoritative review-essay known to be by Mr. Theodore Watts, where it is stated that (whatever the reason) there is pleasure in a sonnet conforming to these prescriptions, a pleasure owing partly to the ear's expectation of a recognised arrangement and partly to some relativity to an absolute metrical law in these pre-

<sup>1</sup> I see that Mr. Hall Caine, in his just published most interesting *Recollections of Rossetti*, refers to the rhymed couplet at the close of a sonnet as being equally offensive to his ear with the couplets at the ends of acts in some Shakespearian plays. While I think that a poor sonnet can be made still poorer by a rhymed couplet-ending, I must otherwise wholly disagree with Mr. Caine. It seems to me that his comparison is not at all fitting, for (in good hands) there is as much difference between the rhymed couplet at the close of a sonnet and the couplets uttered by the last speaker in an act in an old play as between a culminating billow thundered upon the shore and the gurgling lapse of the tide as it retreats down a pebbly strand.

scriptions themselves, and that its structure has been so effected as to produce better than any other number and arrangement of lines a certain melodic effect upon the ear, and an effect that can bear iteration and reiteration in other poems similarly constructed. Experience has proved that fourteen lines constitute the most suitable number, so that neither a poem of thirteen lines nor one of fifteen would contain the capabilities of such adequate expression as characterises the poem of fourteen lines: such a production as Coleridge's *Work without Hope* though not structurally a sonnet, while consisting of fourteen lines, has all the capabilities of a sonnet of the first class save that its structure would not bear reiteration in other poems. It is certainly a matter of congratulation that Coleridge did not write these famous and beautiful lines in the artificial form, for there have been few worse sonnet-writers than the great poet who wrote the most imaginative poem in the language.

The most familiar and the most loved of English sonnets are those with which Shakespeare "unlocked his heart," and these are all characterised by a uniform regularity, though a regularity unlike that of the orthodox or Petrarchan sonnet, their metrical arrangement consisting of three quatrains closing with a rhymed couplet. While Shakespeare's sonnets are indubitably sonnets, and of very noble and magnetic quality, it is fairly certain that their form is not so desirable for common usage, not only on the ground of musical expression but for artistic unity and forceful directness combined—of all known varieties of the sonnet none being so hopelessly incapable in the hands of the versifier. At its best the Shakespearian

sonnet (as in Drayton's supreme example) is like a red-hot bar being moulded upon a forge till—in the closing couplet—it receives the final clenching blow from the heavy hammer ; but the Petrarchan, on the other hand, is like a wind gathering in volume and dying away again immediately on attaining a culminating force. / For the poem that is “a moment's monument,” the embodiment of *one* emotion, *one* thought, the Petrarchan sonnet is not only better than the Shakespearian but than any other assimilative arrangement✓ in Mr. Watts's words, “for the carrying of a single wave of emotion in a single flow and return, nothing has ever being invented comparable to the Petrarchan sonnet, with an octave of two rhymes of a prescribed arrangement, and a sestet which is in some sense free.” And the reason is obvious : the Petrarchan form of the octave is the only form that can maintain the perfect solidarity of the outflowing wave.” The construction here referred to is an octave with two rhyme-sounds ; the first, fourth, fifth, and eighth lines, and the second, third, sixth, and seventh having sympathetic terminals ; while the sestet consists of two or three rhyme-sounds and admits of slight variations in line-arrangement. / It is generally admitted that *no* deviation must be made from this octave-construction, yet he whom not only Rossetti but Mr. Swinburne and others have declared to be the chief living authority on the sonnet has pronounced that *possibly* to the unbiassed ear unfamiliar with the harmonies of the Italian sonnet the sixth and seventh lines might terminate with different rhyme-sounds from the second and third without breaking the solidarity of the emotional wave, and that if such a

license were allowable it "would aid enormously the free expression of the sonnet thought."

The cardinal feature of sonnets of Miltonic movement lies in the continuous expression of the *motif* without mental or structural break, though the Petrarchan octave and sestet are still employed. The emotion being highly and equably sustained from first to last there is a power and dignity and intensity in a Miltonic sonnet that is very remarkable. Three of the most notable instances I can call to mind are Milton's noble sonnet, *On the Late Massacre in Piedmont*, Mr. Lang's sonnet on the *Odyssey*, and Mr. William Rossetti's *Democracy Downtrodden*.<sup>1</sup>

The sonnet form now considered the purest and most orthodox is that with the Petrarchan rhyme-arrangement, and at the same time obedient to the natural law of flow and ebb, and it is on this natural foundation that its probable permanency is based. But because a wave of emotion with its ebb and flow characterises many sonnets it need not characterise all, and it should be borne in mind that Mr. Watts's sonnet, in which this theory was first formulated, was a love-sonnet and introductory to a collection of love-sonnets, and that where the writer deals with intellectual issues, as in *Natura Benigna*, he adopts the form sought by Keats—"Swelling loudly Up to a climax, and then dying proudly." / Absolute dicta as regards artistic structure can hardly be productive of unmixed good. Here is Mr. Watts's sonnet which gave rise to the discussion, an example of the true sonnet according to contemporary election. It appeared some time ago

<sup>1</sup> Vide page 100, ante.

in the *Athenæum*, and afterwards in the anthology so ably edited by Mr. Hall Caine.

### THE LOVE-SONNET.

*(A metrical lesson by the sea-shore.)*

Yon silvery billows breaking on the beach  
Fall back in foam beneath the star-shine clear,  
The while my rhymes are murmuring in your ear  
A restless lore like that the billows teach ;  
For on these sonnet-waves my soul would reach  
From its own depths, and rest within you, dear,  
As, through the billowy voices yearning here  
Great nature strives to find a human speech.

A sonnet is a wave of melody :

From heaving waters of the impassioned soul  
A billow of tidal music one and whole  
Flows in the "octave"; then returning free,  
Its ebbing surges in the "sestet" roll  
Back to the deeps of Life's tumultuous sea.

Rossetti himself, though the greater number of his published sonnets conform to the flow and ebb movement, was thoroughly catholic on the subject. In addition to recognising this writer as the chief authority on sonnet-literature, and having a great admiration for his (in great part unpublished) work, Rossetti (though his own sonnets are, both in temper and in method, the exact opposites of Mr. Watts's) quite agreed with him as to the suitability, both on the score of music and of effectiveness, of a sonnet metrically arranged like those of Petrarch and responsive to the emotional wave in its flow and ebb; but he would not strike his colours in defence of a much greater freedom than would be possible with such a form as the sole permissible one. The comparatively few

printed sonnets by Mr. Theodore Watts I have seen (in the *Athenæum* occasionally, and in Mr. Hall Caine's *Sonnets of Three Centuries*) are interesting from an invariable use of an elision somewhere in octave or sestet. This undoubtedly adds greatly to the sweep or reflux of the emotional wave, but it is open to doubt if such a practice invariably followed up would be advisable. Mr. Watts seems on purpose to avoid decasyllabic uniformity and has declared that the English iambic line is apt to become hard and thin and wiry without occasional elisions of liquids or vowels; and on two occasions at least has introduced an original if somewhat questionable precedent, the second being an innovation, if not upon its "solidarity," at least upon the orthodox sonnet scansion. As an amusing instance of Mr. Watts's love of elision I remember that originally the sixth line of Rossetti's own *Sonnet on the Sonnet* stood thus "Carve it in ivory or ebony," and that it was Mr. Watts who objected strongly to the line both on account of "thinness" and "hiatus" and suggested the change "Carve it in ivory or in ebony"—a change which some will consider an improvement and some the contrary. In the sestet of the second "Parable Sonnet" (*Sonnets of Three Centuries*, page 221), the twelfth and thirteen lines run—

"Filling the Bedouin's brain with bubble of springs,  
And scents of flowers, and shadow of wavering trees;"

and in the beautiful "Channel" Sonnet (No. 1) written in Petit Bot Bay, Guernsey, there is the following sestet, where it will be observed that the writer seeks a variety of cæsuric effects hitherto only attempted in blank verse, and that in the third line

there are two elisions, and one in the fourth and fifth—

“ And smell the sea ! No breath from wood or field,  
 No scent of may or rose or eglantine,  
 Cuts off the old life where cities suffer and pine,  
 Shuts the dark house where Memory stands revealed,  
 Calms the vexed spirit,—balms a sorrow unhealed,—  
 Like scent of sea-weed rich of morn and brine.”

The heave of the ebbing wave is finely represented here ; but if structure is to be modified by emotion, as in this instance, I fail to see why on instinctive preference the rhymed couplet-ending should not equally be occasionally selected. To take an instance from Rossetti's sonnet-work, who would wish to change the noble and Shakespearian sestet concluding *Her Heaven* (*House of Life*, p. 220) for a rhyme-arrangement that would adapt itself to the Petrarchan model ?

“ The sunrise blooms and withers on the hill  
 Like any hillflower ; and the noblest troth  
 Dies here to dust. Yet shall Heaven's promise clothe  
 Even yet those lovers who have cherished still  
 This test for love : in every kiss sealed fast  
 To feel the first kiss and forbode the last.”

About five-and-twenty of Rossetti's printed sonnets have rhymed couplet-endings, and of these nineteen are to be found in *The House of Life*.

In all, his printed sonnets amount to 152 in number, which can be classed as follows :—Twenty-seven Sonnets for Pictures, exclusive of two Italian duplicates and of three embodied in *The House of Life*, and inclusive of one unpublished sonnet on *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (No. 2);<sup>1</sup> twenty-five miscellaneous, including, besides seven unpublished in his collected

<sup>1</sup> See page 130, *ante*.

work, his sonnet on the Sonnet ; and a hundred and one, constituting *The House of Life*.

While there seems to me but little doubt that his supreme poems are *Sister Helen*, *Rose Mary*, and *The King's Tragedy*, there is as little doubt that the sonnet was his special vehicle of expression, and that he has used it in such a way that his name as a sonnet-writer must always be associated with Shakespeare, Milton, Mrs. Browning, and Wordsworth. *The House of Life* is as much a revelation of the inner man as is the collection by the author of *Hamlet* ; and if Rossetti's sonnets are not as a rule characterised by the *imperativeness* of those of Milton, by the acute personal note of the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, or by the serene transparency of the best of Wordsworth, they have these qualities in less degree blended with other characteristics that place them in the front rank of sonnet literature. They have a luminous vision, an urgency of revelation, that now and again become overwhelming, though they seldom reach to the heights of intellectual passion, seldom spring from aspiration, spiritual hope, or wide human sympathy. In addition to this, they are in general characterised by sonorous metrical and rhythmical effects unparalleled in our language ; so much so, that it may be doubted if any literature, even that of Spain, could produce a poem or sonnet-sequence equal in depth and volume of sound to *The House of Life*.

There is still an idea amongst those not acquainted with literary forms that the sonnet is a somewhat trivial production, owing to its brief limit and single-idea principle ; some who follow the opinions of Dr. Johnson, who surely ought now to be let alone with his Dictionary and Lives. Although the learned if



portentously intellectual doctor spoke disparagingly of this form when he compared sonnet-writing to carving heads on cherry-stones, it must be remembered on what occasion he made the remark, when it will be evident he was no judge, or was at any rate prejudiced; for the phrase was drawn from him not by the fanciful pieces of the period, but by the noble sonnets of Milton. The author of *Rasselas* fully recognised that the genius of the author of *Paradise Lost* was one fitted to "hew a Colossus out of a rock,"/but not, he believed, for sonnet-writing which he characterised as above. It would surprise many to know how Rossetti, for one, dealt with *motifs* thus expressed, how he weighed every word, balanced the rhythmical movement, attuned the sonorous effect of every line and polished to the utmost the double facet of every sonnet he wrote. Though Keats declared sustained invention to be the polar star of poetry, it is not length that necessarily confers the crown of worth to a poem and there are many instances in sonnet-literature of "fourteen-line poems" which embrace all needful to be said, and this with a concise force and beauty impossible to any other metrical form. Such an example is to be found in the following sonnet, which is not only the most beautiful of all Rossetti's Sonnets on Pictures, but (in my opinion) the most *exquisite* of all the poems in this form he has written:—

#### A VENETIAN PASTORAL.

By GIORGIONE.

Water, for anguish of the solstice:—nay,  
 But dip the vessel slowly,—nay, but lean  
 And hark how at its verge the wave sighs in  
 Reluctant. Hush! Beyond all depth away

The heat lies silent at the brink of day :  
 Now the hand trails upon the viol-string  
 That sobs, and the brown faces cease to sing,  
 Sad with the whole of pleasure. Whither stray  
 Her eyes now, from whose mouth the slim pipes creep  
 And leave it pouting, while the shadowed grass  
 Is cool against her naked side ? Let be :—  
 Say nothing now unto her lest she weep,  
 Nor name this ever. Be it as it was,—  
 Life touching lips with Immortality.

This lovely sonnet in its original form was composed before the author's twenty-second year, and I will now give it as it appeared in *The Germ* in 1850, not only because of its great interest, as showing how much even an exquisite poem can be altered for the better by a loving craftsman, but also because of the almost equal beauty by which its varying lines were from the first characterised :—

Water, for anguish of the solstice,—yea,  
 Over the vessel's mouth still widening  
 Listlessly dipt to let the water in  
 With slow vague gurgle. Blue, and deep away  
 The heat lies silent at the brink of day.  
 Now the hand trails upon the viol-string  
 That sobs ; and the brown faces cease to sing,  
 Mournful with complete pleasure. Her eyes stray  
 In distance ; through her lips the pipe doth creep  
 And leaves them pouting ; the green shadowed grass  
 Is cool against her naked flesh. Let be :  
 Say nothing now unto her lest she weep,  
 Nor name this ever. Be it as it was,—  
 Life touching lips with Immortality.

As will be seen, it is essentially the same sonnet, and there are lines in it almost as exquisite as in the later version, especially those (despite such rhymes as "widening" and "in")—

"Listlessly dipt to let the water in  
With slow vague gurgle."

The most important alteration lies in a single word, namely, the substitution in the eleventh line of "side" for "flesh," the artistic gain of which cannot but be at once evident on a comparative reading.

Its fine companion sonnet on Andrea Mantegna's *Allegorical Dance of Women* (companion in the sense that they are placed side by side and that both are addressed to pictures in the Louvre) also appeared in *The Germ*, and with slightly different readings from the later version. As already mentioned (page 99), six sonnets appeared in the last number of that magazine—the two just named, the two on Ingres' *Ruggiero and Angelica*, and two not since republished. The second couple have hardly been altered at all, or so slightly as not to require special notice, but in the originals octave and sestet are not divided by a space, and the title is *Angelica Rescued from the Sea-Monster*. The two sonnets not since republished are both on paintings by Hans Memmeling at Bruges; but however interesting as exhibit of the undoubted high regard he had in his youth for the Flemish master they are so crude that Rossetti wisely omitted them from his collected poems. One is on "A Virgin and Child" and the other on "A Marriage of St. Katherine," but as the author had evidently no desire for their resuscitation, and as such would serve no good end, there is no necessity for their being quoted. Another fine sonnet, written in early life but not published till 1870, is that on Leonardo da Vinci's *Our Lady of the Rocks*, subtly interpretive and excellent in itself; and in the *Ballads and Sonnets* are two others on the works of

old masters—one on *The Holy Family* of Michaelangelo in the National Gallery, and the other on Sandro Botticelli's *Spring* in the Accademia of Florence. Of the remaining Sonnets on Pictures only one is on the work of a contemporary, viz. on *The Wine of Circe*, by Mr. Burne Jones, a beautiful and powerful sonnet. *Mary's Girlhood*, *The Passover in the Holy Family*, *Mary Magdalen at the Door of Simon the Pharisee*, *St. Luke*, *Lilith*, *Sibylla Palmifera*, *Venus*, *Cassandra*, *Found*, *A Sea Spell*, *Fiammetta*, *The Day-Dream*, *Astarte Syriaca*, *Proserpina*, and *La Bella Mano*, have each been quoted or referred to in connection with the pictures they were written for, and are so closely connected therewith that they need not be again enlarged upon, excepting a few brief remarks. Of those mentioned, *Lilith* and *Sibylla Palmifera* now form part of *The House of Life*, appearing there under the respective titles *Soul's Beauty* and *Body's Beauty*, and as No. 74 in the same sequence is the *St. Luke* sonnet. In the powerful *Venus* sonnet there is a recurrence in the last line in the 1881 edition to an earlier version; all antecedent readings gave

“And her grove glow with lovelit fires of Troy,”

which is now altered to the original line, which is certainly more forceful—

“And through her dark grove strike the light of Troy.”

*Pandora* is almost as fine in words as in crayons, but necessarily appeals most strongly to those who have seen the noble design itself: the only alteration in the latest version being the substitution of *clench* for *hug* in the twelfth line. /

Of the twenty-nine "miscellaneous" sonnets that have been printed, twenty-four are included in the two published volumes, and of these three have been included in the completed *House of Life*, namely *Autumn Idleness*, *Farewell to the Glen*, and *The Monochord*, where they will again be referred to.

*On Refusal of Aid between Nations* is the most Miltonic of all Rossetti's sonnets, and is as fine as it is powerful a composition. In the octave the poet exclaims that the wrath of God is impendent over the world, not so much because of all the wrong that is evermore transpiring—

"But because man is parcelled out in men  
Even thus ; because, for any wrongful blow,  
No man not stricken asks, ' I would be told  
Why thou dost strike ;' but his heart whispers then,  
' He is he, I am I.' By this we know  
That the earth falls asunder, being old."

In the 1881 edition, the words *to-day* and *thus* are substituted for "even thus" and "strike." *On the Vita Nuova* is just such a sonnet as might have been expected from one who so early apprehended and so ably translated Dante's famous love record ; but more interesting is the personal utterance of *Dantis Tenebræ*, written in memory of the poet's father. This pathetic and beautiful sonnet is a gracious tribute to one who was well and truly loved by his children, and it contains lines aptly describing the mystic sides of the author's genius—

"And did'st thou know indeed, when at the font  
Together with thy name thou gav'st me his,  
That also on thy son must Beatrice  
Decline her eyes according to her wont,

*Accepting me to be of those that haunt  
The vale of magical dark mysteries,  
Where to the hills her poet's foot-track lies,  
And wisdom's living fountain to his chaunt  
Trembles in music ? ”*

*Beauty and the Bird* has nothing to recommend it to special notice, and it is indeed more like a translation from some mediæval sonneteer than Rossetti's own work; but *A Watch with the Moon* is clever and attractive, though the alteration of “vapourish” to “liquorish” is no gain in sound whatever it may be in sense.

There is a fine series of five sonnets on the same number of English poets, viz. Chatterton, Blake, Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley, in the second volume of poems. The first of these, if I am not mistaken, was written for Mr. Theodore Watts to embody in his paper on Chatterton in Ward's English Poets; but for some reason, perhaps from the fact that Mr. Watts could not agree with the placing of Chatterton on a par with, or at least next to, Shakespeare, it did not appear as intended. The lines are generous and enthusiastic, but it is difficult to realise that Rossetti could really hold such an extreme opinion regarding Chatterton: perhaps it was engendered by a late acquaintance and the enthusiasm that comes from the sense of having discovered a treasure hitherto neglected, for I have heard Rossetti state that his knowledge of the unfortunate poet's work was of very recent growth and owing to the friend whose name must so often occur in any record of the last ten years of the poet-painter's life. The sonnet on Blake is dedicated to Mr. Frederick Shields, a friend of twenty years' standing and an artist whom Rossetti greatly admired, and, like himself, an enthusiastic admirer of

the visionary author of *The Songs of Innocence*; the subject being a sketch by Mr. Shields of Blake's room in Fountain Court. The sestet of that on Coleridge is very fine, full of regret yet thankful that at least six out of the poet's sixty years were saved to noble work in literature, only six years—

“Yet kindling skies  
Own them, a beacon to our centuries.”

There is a certain effort in the noble sonnet on Shelley, but that on Keats is just what might have been expected from the poet who regarded Keats with an untiring loyalty of love and admiration:—

“Thou whom the daisies glory in growing o'er,—  
Their fragrance clings around thy name, not writ  
But rumour'd in water, while the fame of it  
Along Time's flood goes echoing evermore.”

The sonnet called *Tiber, Nile, and Thames* must have cost the author a good deal of trouble, for I recollect having heard at least three versions of it; but the result is not proportionately good. The reverse, indeed, is the case, and I even doubt if it is entitled to rank as a sonnet at all; for, in the first place, the introduction of three such unconnected motifs as the Tiber and murdered Cicero and Fulvia, the Nile and Cleopatra, and the Thames where Keats withered, Coleridge pined, and Chatterton starved, is a great drawback to concise and yet ample exemplification; and, in the second place, the octave and sestet have no artistic coherency. Besides mention of Rome, of the Forum, and of the Tiber, there are also seven names of persons—Cicero, Fulvia, Mark Antony, Cleopatra, Keats, Coleridge, and Chatterton; altogether presenting such diverse lights that no sonnet-

lens could really well succeed in embracing them in one focus. As an experiment of how much can be got into fourteen lines it possesses great merit ; but it is not a sonnet in the true sense of the word. The lines printed opposite to it, and entitled *The Last Three from Trafalgar*, are of a very different order, and constitute not only one of Rossetti's most striking sonnets but form also perhaps the most powerful utterance that has been given in days when Trafalgar is beginning to seem far off. Another fine composition is that on the late Czar, Alexander the Second, and I may take this opportunity of stating that Rossetti was not so indifferent to great political questions as is generally supposed. Though a liberal in politics, his sympathies (as he said) "were with the man who by liberating forty million serfs brought upon himself the hatred of those blood-thirsty agitators that are impeding Europe in the march of progress." *Words on the Window-Pane* is characteristic, but it is spoiled in music by the fourth line—"scratched it through tettered cark ;" and that on the Place de la Bastille is sympathetic with its affecting subject. *Winter* and *Spring* are two very beautiful "natural" sonnets, the former being especially picturesque ; but the closing lines of *Spring* exhibit a reversion from "natural" to literary poetry very characteristic of the author whenever attempting transcription from nature.

*The Church Porch* was written about 1852 and was the first of two sonnets with the same *raison d'être*, but the author did not wish the second to be printed : it is representative of the reaction experienced in finding a soulless service in the building wherein were expected to be found



“Silence, and sudden dimness, and deep prayer,  
And faces of crowned angels all about.”

*Untimely Lost* is a pathetic and beautiful tribute to the memory of Oliver Madox Brown from whose genius Rossetti, in common with many others, expected so much good fruit, expectations that were so sadly and prematurely disappointed.

Having now referred to nearly all the printed pictorial and miscellaneous sonnets other than those added to *The House of Life*, I will conclude this chapter with two not to be found in either volume.<sup>1</sup> The first appeared in the *Academy* for 15th February 1871 and is dated from Stratford-on-Avon, and is a good example of Rossetti's humour and earnestness in one; the second is addressed to Mr. Philip Bourke Marston, the author of *Song-Tide*, etc., and a friend of younger years whom Rossetti both loved and believed in, and whose powers are all the more remarkable from the terrible disadvantage of blindness.

ON THE SITE OF A MULBERRY TREE ;

*Planted by Wm. Shakespeare ; felled by the Rev. F. Gastrell.*

This tree, here fall'n, no common birth or death  
Shared with its kind. The world's enfranchised son,  
Who found the trees of Life and Knowledge one,  
Here set it, frailer than his laurel-wreath.  
Shall not the wretch whose hand it fell beneath  
Rank also singly—the supreme unhung ?  
Lo ! Sheppard, Turpin, pleading with black tongue  
This viler thief's unsuffocated breath !

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<sup>1</sup> For the fine sonnet *Raleigh's Cell in the Tower*, see Mr. Caine's *Sonnets of Three Centuries*.

We'll search thy glossary, Shakespeare ! whence almost,  
And whence alone, some name shall be revealed  
For this deaf drudge, to whom no length of ears  
Sufficed to catch the music of the spheres ;  
Whose soul is carrion now,—too mean to yield  
Some tailor's ninth-allotment of a ghost.

TO P. B. MARSTON.

Sweet poet, thou of whom these years that roll  
Must one day, yet, the burdened birthright learn,  
And by the darkness of thine eyes discern  
How piercing was the sight within thy soul,  
Gifted, apart, thou goest to the great goal,  
A cloud-bound, radiant spirit, strong to earn,  
Light-reft, that prize for which fond myriads yearn  
Vainly, light-blest,—the seer's aureole.

And doth thine ear, divinely dowered to catch  
All spherul sounds, in thy song blent so well,  
Still hearken for my voice's slumbering spell  
With wistful love ? ah ! let the muse now snatch  
My wreath for thy young brows, and bend to watch  
Thy veiled, transfiguring sense's miracle.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE HOUSE OF LIFE.

"Should he (Rossetti) complete *The House of Life* upon its original projection, he will leave a monument of beauty more lasting than the tradition of his presence."

E. C. STEDMAN, *Victorian Poets*.

"Above all ideal personalities with which the poet must learn to identify himself, there is one supremely real which is the most imperative of all; namely, that of his reader. And the practical watchfulness needed for such assimilation is as much a gift and instinct as is the creative grasp of alien character. It is a spiritual contact hardly conscious yet ever renewed, and which must be a part of the very act of production."

D. G. ROSSETTI.

BOTH these quotations are very *apropos* to the subject, the first being a concise statement of a fact that is almost beyond doubt, and the second an utterance of peculiar significance in connection with the author himself and with the famous Sonnet-Sequence called *The House of Life*. The latter statement is a dictum that Rossetti acted up to in the main, but which he by no means invariably fulfilled: the greater part of the *House of Life* does conform to the artistic requirement that the sympathetic bond between poet and reader must take precedence of ideal personalities, but not infrequently is the reader arrested by obscurity of expression, by a too subjective *motif* or treatment of

*motif*, and by an absence of certain qualities where such might have been expected. While it is beyond doubt that the poet has in this series left behind him a monument of beauty that will last as long or longer than the tradition of his presence, it must be admitted that it does not embrace one-half of what constitutes the life of emotion, and that the title is a misnomer in so far as it is meant to be an adequate representation of the life spiritual. *The House of Life* is too significant a name to be mainly limited only to the expression of all the varying emotions that accompany the passion of love, for nothing can then be given to the passion of the intellect, little or nothing to wider human hopes and fears, to the longings and aspirations of the individual soul and of a spirit sympathetic with the general life of humanity. So that in the beautiful work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (for *one* work it is despite its composition being of an hundred sonnets, as much as the collection of lyrics called *In Memoriam* is a poetic unity), while we find the most subtle shades of personal pain, regret, shadowy hope, remorse, spiritual agony, love, passion, rapture, foreboding, despondency, frustration, we do not in addition find the high hope of the soul that we associate with Shelley or the joy in life so characteristic of Keats. We pass through a shadowy land, remote from the pathways of men,

"Nor spire may rise nor bell be heard therefrom"—

where seldom the wind rises from the "secret groves" into wide, sweet, and passionate force, where the rustling leaves are like regrets and sorrows, and the flowers like remembered joys, and where the dull

monotone of a sailless sea haunts the margins as though vague and doubtful hopes and sad despondencies were blent into environing sound. Here and there we do indeed come upon a sonnet that has the effect of a sudden trumpet-note, a startling individual revelation that must affect every reader, a passionate insight that, like a flash of lightning, lays bare some new aspect of life; and nothing finer or nobler of their kind can well be imagined than such sonnets as *Known in Vain*, *The Heart of the Night*, *Stillborn Love*, *Barren Spring*, *Vain Virtues*, *Lost Days*, *Newborn Death*, and others of like supremity, but those form a small minority in a hundred. But the impression, nevertheless, remains that the series is, in the main, a record of individual emotions suggested by the presence and absence of embodied love and what such absence and presence individually entail, a record of such and little further,—a House, not of Life, but of Love.

As the latter is it of more than great value, it is almost as precious a gift or legacy as the life-sonnets of Shakespeare or the love-record of Mrs. Browning. When we look upon these poems, not as *The House of Life* but as the revelations of the inner life of a great genius, we feel that in our generation a heritage has been bequeathed to posterity even more valuable than that which was the due of all lovers of art, those sonnets of ~~Raffaello~~ but once written out and irrevocably lost, and not only as the heritage of a great artist or, in addition, that of one who was in the front rank of the poets of his time, but one also who by his magnetic personality influenced younger men of genius in two arts to an extent even at present widely re-

cognised, and to whom is to be traced as to immediate fount the wide-spread æsthetic movement (insistence on a beautiful in place of an ugly or commonplace environment) which has so affected and changed our social life, the principle of which is still a potent influence in the formation of a great school of poetic art, and, though to a less degree, still guides or affects our higher literature.

In stating that the hundred sonnets of Rossetti to which this chapter is devoted could more fitly be entitled *The House of Love*, it must not be understood that sexual love only is meant, for this, though the main-spring or the central influence of the series, is not the sole *motif*. "I have loved the principle of Beauty in all things," said Keats; and to no man since Keats could the phrase be more applicable than to the author of *The House of Life*. Art in the abstract was a beautiful dream to Rossetti; in the concrete, it represented the embodiment of dreams after the beautiful; in poetry, the beautiful (with all its varying manifestations) was to him as essential as foliage to a tree; in his own life we know, as expressed in the *Sibylla Palmifera* sonnet, Beauty was the shrine at which he worshipped, the ideal which he pursued, the object of undivided and unfaltering praise from voice and hand. And it is this beauty that is celebrated in many of the sonnets, always intensely individual as these are, yet not applicable to the author alone. Their best possible title would have been their present sub-title, *A Sonnet-Sequence*; this would have been true, for the series is as much a poem of interlinked stanzas as if the latter followed each other without break of page in the manner of coherent verses; and it would also have been not only more exactly

descriptive than *The House of Life*, but even than *The House of Love*, from the fact that whatever else is in these sonnets touched upon—and we know how much in its degree this is—there is but little of that inspiration, either for good or evil, which makes love the greatest factor in the evolution of individual lives and of nations. These sonnets are the record of what a poet-soul has felt, and we see that love meant with him a dream of happiness while present, a dream of regret and a sense of frustration when passed away, but not that it inspired him to action or made his ideals more impersonal, or gave his aspirations wings to escape from the desolate haunts of sorrow and despondency and vague half-real hopes. Therefore it is not so much that Love was the soul of his genius, as that his genius lived and had its being in the shadow of Love. ✓

“The quality of finish in poetic execution is of two kinds. The first and highest is that where the work has been all mentally ‘cartooned,’ as it were, beforehand, by a process intensely conscious, but patient and silent—an occult evolution of life.” These are Rossetti’s own words, and none better could be chosen in which to express the method of his own composition. Almost invariably his work was mentally “cartooned” beforehand, and though in actual committal of his conceptions to paper he was not an “inspired” writer in the sense that the “glory of words” came to him almost without volition, the original “cartoon” was present in his mind from the first, fulfilling literally his own dictum as to the sonnet being “a moment’s monument.” His “conception” seldom underwent modification from the exigencies of rhyme or limitations of the sonnet structure, but though present in each sonnet in its entirety it

occasionally was expressed so overweighted with symbolism that its significance is by no means clearly cartooned for the reader—so uttered that its application is not at first easily apprehended. The sonnet *Love's Redemption* and those called *Willowwood* are instances in point. In a brilliant essay on Physiognomic Poetry a well-known writer has pointed out<sup>1</sup> that with the truest poets inferences as to the *men* can be safely inferred from their poems, that "from genuine poetry we always get either the genuine physiognomy of the poet's mind, or a reflex of the outer world, as genuine as it can be, taking into account that the mirror is a moving and a coloured one, like the amber-tinted stream of a brook in autumn;" and by this test an inferential character may be drawn of Dante Gabriel Rossetti from *The House of Life*. Judging thus inferentially, those who had never met or seen him, or who had never heard of his personality, would discern a man with an acute, even painfully acute, sensibility, with a passionate love of the beautiful, with a habit of morbid introspection and a tendency to succumb to morbid impulses, with an occasional passion and vehemence startling in its suddenness, and, while of an essentially spiritual nature, forced by bent of genius into poetic expression wherein sensuous images and symbolism are pre-eminent. //

And this brings me to the point of the morality of *The House of Life*. Attack after attack has been made on certain sonnets by Rossetti ever since the publication of his first volume in 1870, and so late as a few months ago one well-known "Review" achieved the

<sup>1</sup> "Alfred de Musset and Physiognomic Poetry" (in the *New Quarterly Magazine*, 1878), by Theodore Watts.



unenviable distinction of having restored a style of criticism long supposed to have been buried with Gifford *et hoc genus omne*, of having indeed added to the old *Quarterly* brutality a *soupçon* of shameful inference and foul imagery that lifts it to the summit of the dunghill-Parnassus which was thought to have been rased to the ground. /

What constitutes poetic morality is not my province at present to attempt to explain, nor have I space for any such examination as would be requisite in the case of a subject that has puzzled and misled many. But I am confident that no impartial reader could find in *The House of Life* or elsewhere in Rossetti's poems the least breath of licentiousness, that few would even discern an immorality that was not volitional but due to self-sophistication. No true advocate of the genius of the man who was so recently taken away from us would defend every line he has written *as it stands*—but even for a moment to take this ground, are there as many as a dozen lines at the uttermost in *The House of Life* that could offend the most fastidious critic or sensitive spirit? It seems to me that lines here and there, and sonnets such as *Love's Redemption* and *Nuptial Sleep*,<sup>1</sup> are, however "sincere" and spiritual in conception, mistakingly expressed, for the same reason that made the writer I last quoted state "that art knows only æsthetical sanctions: the doctrine of sincerity is a sophism." Yet Rossetti held this latter opinion himself, and would have been (as he sometimes experienced) more hurt by a charge of animalism than can be well made realisable, for he

<sup>1</sup> The first of these is very materially altered as it stands in the completed *House of Life* (*Love's Testament*), and the second is omitted altogether.

considered his genius to be of an essentially spiritual though mystical order. The reason of all the misunderstanding such sonnets as those just mentioned have given rise to, of the unjust attacks they have opened the door to, and of the bitterness and disappointment they caused their author, lies simply in the fact that the sensuous expression of however spiritual a thought seemed unavoidable, or at any rate but natural to him. So that when at times this tendency carried away his judgment he used expressions in clothing his thought that caused great misunderstanding and even antipathy to a wide number, and consequent pain and disappointment to himself; but it was the former reason, and no withdrawal from an artistic position, that led him to materially alter *Love's Redemption* and a few lines here and there elsewhere, and to omit *Nuptial Sleep*. But to the last he maintained, what was indeed the case, that they were written out of no mere physical emotion and with no irreverence; that, personally speaking, he would never have withdrawn them from the fitting chambers they occupied in his *House of Life*, but that identifying himself with his readers, as he considered it the imperative duty of a poet to do, and finding that to the body of these readers certain passages were stumbling-blocks not so much because of immorality as what seemed an unpleasant excess of realism of a kind *not* suitable for an indiscriminate audience, he came to the conclusion that it was right he should preclude *Nuptial Sleep* from the collection, and that *Love's Redemption*, *Vain Virtues*, and one or two others should be somewhat modified. And in thus choosing there can be little doubt but that Rossetti was right; the omitted sonnet and the altered lines were not integral parts of the whole, and the act

would entail on the one hand not only a larger circle of readers but on the other no artistic loss in the sense of leaving a hiatus in the complete Sonnet-Sequence. He fully recognised that no such hiatus would be caused, for on a friend's proposing that he could solve the difficulty, if as a difficulty it still existed, by writing a sonnet immediately akin to *Nuptial Sleep*, with or without the same title and less realistically expressed, he declined on the ground that the *motif* was unnecessary to the main conception, and that it had therefore better be let alone altogether. He was too true a poet to indulge in the heresy underlying the doctrine of art for art's sake ; a doctrine that he accepted and carried out in so far as consistent with his instinctively or consciously apprehended ethics of artistic creation, so far and no farther. I once asked him how he would reply to the asseveration that he was the head of the " Art for Art's sake " school, and his response was to the effect that the principle of the phrase was two-thirds absolutely right and one-third so essentially wrong that it negatived the whole as an aphorism. In the right sense of the phrase no artist ever did more truly follow out the principle of art for art's sake, but neither as artist nor poet did he forget those limitations to reticence of inclination or experiment which true Art has ordained in authentic if strictly unformulated command. /,

The sonnet on the Sonnet that is prefixed to the completed *House of Life* is notable for its opening line or lines, unnecessary again to quote ; but beyond this I confess I can see in it no special merit as a sonnet, still less as a sonnet on the sonnet ; indeed, on the other hand, it seems to me to have an obscurity equalling the most obscure passages Rossetti has composed elsewhere,

and as an explanatory poem to enlighten no farther than the concise and admirable first, or, at the outside, the first five lines.<sup>1</sup> Comparing the fifth line as it stands in the *Ballads and Sonnets* with the corresponding line in the engraved design which forms the frontispiece to this volume, it will be observed that the word *arduous* has replaced *intricate*, a change that is open to doubt as to being for the better. It is curious that so careful a sonnet-writer, and one who was so well able to criticise obscurity in the style of another,<sup>1</sup> could conclude the octave of a sonnet meant to convey an instructional idea with such rhetorical and absolutely meaningless lines as—

“ . . . . . ; and let Time see  
Its flowering crest impearled and orient.”

The sestet is almost as obscurely rhetorical as the octave. To apply his own words to himself—“we have to regret that even complete obscurity is a not uncommon blemish, while imperfect expression seems too often to be attributable to a neglect of means, and this despite the fact that a sense of style is certainly one of the first impressions derived from (his) writings. But we fear that a too great and probably organic abstraction of mind interferes continually with the projection of his thoughts:” an application that, with slight modification, is by no means exaggerated. //

The author originally intended to call his Sonnet-Sequence *Sonnets and Songs of Love, Life, and Death*, but abandoned this title for the more epigrammatic one it has become so widely known by; and of the fifty sonnets that appeared in the *Poems* of 1870, six-

<sup>1</sup> *The Academy*, February 1, 1871.

teen only had ever been seen by others than a few privileged acquaintances.<sup>1</sup> In the same volume, and under the same general title, eleven lyrics were added, but these were afterwards withdrawn from *The House of Life* and printed separately.✓

*The House of Life* is divided into two parts, the first of which consists of fifty-nine sonnets grouped under the sub-title *Youth and Change*, and of which twenty-six appeared in the *Poems*; the second part embraces only fourteen new and twenty-eight formerly printed sonnets, with the sub-title changed to *Change and Fate*—in all, one hundred and one sonnets. The opening lines are called *Love Enthroned*, and no more fitting first sonnet to such a collection could well have been composed, even by the poet himself; we realise at once that it is love indeed who is lord of this House, and the serene height of his ideal personality is brought home to us in fine lines. Truth, with awed lips, and Hope, with eyes upcast, pass before the poet's vision, then Fame and Youth—

“And Life, still wreathing flowers for Death to wear;”

but in power and majesty Love transcends all these—

“Love's throne was not with these; but far above  
All passionate wind of welcome and farewell  
He sat in breathless bowers they dream not of;  
Though Truth foreknow Love's heart, and Hope foretell,  
And Fame be for Love's sake desirable,  
And Youth be dear, and Life be sweet to Love.”

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<sup>1</sup> Namely, those numbered in the completed *House of Life* XXV., XXXIX., XLVII., XLIX.-LII., LXIII., LXV., LXVII., LXXXVI., XCI., XCV., XCVII., XCIX., C. *Vide Fortnightly Review* for March 1869.

This prelude or introductory sonnet is followed by one chronicling the Birth of Love, or *Bridal Birth*; a fine sonnet, but exhibiting that abrupt transition from one concrete statement to another equally clear to the author, necessitating swift apprehension on the part of a reader to whom the train of thought too suddenly or obscurely passes into a relative but different groove. It has one alteration from all previous versions, namely, the substitution of *shadowed* for *shielded* in the ninth line. Number III. is the sonnet that was previously called *Love's Redemption*, wherein the imagery of Sacramental communion was made to symbolise the giving up of one's life to another in love; the third and eighth lines being those that, with the substitution of *heart* for *lips* in the second line, have been materially altered. As *Love's Testament* it is not so magnetic in its attractiveness as before, but the author did not therefore decide unwisely when he considered it best to make the slight but material differences before re-incorporation with the completed *House of Life*. The octave of *Lovesight* has the charm that appeals to us so forcibly at times in the "Songs" and "Preludes" of Schumann, Schubert, Chopin, and others of later date but allied in expression of sentiment; and in the sestet the first note is struck of that foreboding which again and again comes in throughout the sequence like some deep mournful chord of Handel in a solemn music—a sense of inevitable loss, an anticipated regret, an anticipated despair—

"O love, my love! if I no more should see  
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,  
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring—

How then should sound upon Life's darkening slope  
The ground-whirl of the perished leaves of Hope,  
The wind of Death's imperishable wing?"

*Heart's Hope* is one of those lately added to *The House of Life*, but whether of early or recent composition I cannot say; in either case it is not in the front rank of Rossetti's sonnets, and to me the two final lines seem to verge on bathos. An undue weight of words is given to a thought that is neither original nor specially profound. The latter lines of the octave at once recall the close of the lyric called *Love Lily*,

"Whose speech Truth knows not from her thought,  
Nor Love her body from her soul." ✓

*The Kiss* is a sonnet that exemplifies the over-elaboration into which Rossetti's intensely artistic temperament sometimes betrayed him; for illness or misfortune we have "seizure of malign vicissitude;" for the embrace of two lovers—

"For lo! even now my lady's lips did play  
With these my lips such consonant interlude!"

a style that is too laboured to be really artistic, too artificially artistic to be poetry. Originally *Nuptial Sleep* succeeded to *The Kiss*, but as it is omitted from *The House of Life* there is no necessity to refer to it again; it is in every sense of the word a cancelled poem, the author having refused it a place either in *The House of Life* or elsewhere in his two published volumes, and at the same time having refused to let it stand as a separate entity on the ground that he would never have written such a sonnet as an independent composition, and that he regarded it now simply in the

light of a deleted passage or cancelled verse. *Supreme Surrender*, though strictly akin to *Nuptial Sleep*, has nothing in it that can honestly be objectionable to any sane man or woman ; it is splendid emotional music as well as being a powerful sonnet. Its *motif* was previously lyrically expressed by the author in the twentieth and twenty-first verses of *The Stream's Secret*, and in its earlier version (differing in the second line only) it was superior to the substituted reading. *Love's Lovers* exemplifies the difference between mere surface-worship of love and the innermost shrines wherein he dwells ; and the succeeding sonnet is a beautiful presentation of the Passion of Love and Love's Worship, one flame-winged and with a mastering music like the dominant sound of the sea, and one "a white-winged harp-player" whose harp hath not the rapturous tone of Passion's hautboy, but a softer, purer music, a "cadence deep and clear." In the *Portrait*, poet and painter both find utterance—the former exulting in the knowledge that any one who would in future years look upon the loveliness he has perpetuated on canvas must come to *him*—that when both have passed away from life each will yet live in the other inseparable in the portrait he has made, she the painted and he the painter ; and this sonnet is followed by another personal one, wherein in vision the poet sees the lady of his love bending over the love-letter she is writing. *The Lover's Walk* is a beautiful sonnet that must appeal to all who have loved, who like these lovers can recall June days when they walked hand in hand through scented hedgerows, when hearts at one in all things leaned against each other



“ As the cloud-foaming firmamental blue  
Rests on the blue line of a foamless sea ”—

and as with *The Lover's Walk*, so with *Youth's Antiphony* and *Youth's Spring-Tribute*, with the latter's beautiful *April* lines—

“ On these debateable borders of the year  
Spring's foot half falters ; scarce she yet may know  
The leafless blackthorn-blossom from the snow ;  
And through her bowers the wind's way still is clear.”

The fifteenth sonnet touches a deeper chord, and uses the simile of twin-birth to signify the bond between two souls of nearer kindred than material relationship, giving expression to the penetrating sense of spiritual kinship—

“ Known for my soul's birth-partner well enough !”

*A Day of Love* takes high rank in *The House of Life*, but *Beauty's Pageant* recalls a style of sonnet-writing germane to that of the Elizabethan age with its delight in intricate and laboured imagery and quaint affectation. Asking what in nature can vie with the moods of varying grace characteristic of his lady's beauty “ within this hour, within this room,” he speaks of the “ *song full-quiured, sweet June's encomiast,*” and in the sestet compares each “ fine movement ” to “ lily or swan or swan-stemmed galiot.”

Originally, *A Day's Love* was succeeded by *Love-Sweetness*, but besides *Beauty's Pageant* three other sonnets are interpolated in the completed sequence, namely, *Genius in Beauty*, *Silent Noon*, and *Gracious Moonlight*. Each is beautiful ; and in the first is an aphorism which though not strictly original is yet

thoroughly individualistic — "*Beauty like her's is genius*," in the second we have one of the most beautiful natural utterances of Rossetti, so true that the sonnet is apt to mislead as to his understanding and love of nature, which has already been remarked on as, speaking generally, strangely deficient; and in the third we find lines as beautiful as in *Silent Noon*, but defaced by the introduction of such stilted nomenclature as "*Queen Dian*" for the "*moon*." The octave of this twentieth sonnet culminates sonorously with suggestion of comparison—

". . . Of that face  
What shall be said,—which, like a governing star,  
Gathers and garners from all things that are  
Their silent penetrative loveliness?"

And the sestet unfolds the comparison thus beautifully, save for the exception I have remarked—

"O'er water-daisies and wild waifs of Spring,  
There where the iris rears its gold-crowned sheaf  
With flowering rush and sceptred arrow-leaf,  
So have I marked Queen Dian, in bright ring  
Of cloud above and wave below, take wing  
And chase night's gloom, as thou the spirit's grief."

The great gain not only the simile or the sestet but the whole sonnet would achieve by some such reading of the fourth sestet-line as the following must surely be evident to every one—

"So have I marked the crescent moon in ring  
Of cloud above and wave below, take wing," etc. /

This is merely a suggestion, of course, and not put forward as in itself anything beyond an example to the

point ; but let the reader go through the sonnet with the suggested alteration, or any other image that comes uppermost in his mind, and the essential gain to the whole can hardly fail to be at once observable. As it stands, the sonnet has the same effect upon me as if an orator had begun his address with noble eloquence and wound up his periods with some stilted and conventional commonplace. No poet of nature would have so written, but it is surprising that so careful an artist as Rossetti should have written sequent words with such unpleasantly accentuated assonance as *Queen Dian, in bright ring*, etc. As in *Gracious Moonlight* the reader may discern the literary tendency of the author in natural descriptiveness, so in the otherwise noble sonnet *Love Sweetness* he may realise the intense abstraction of the poet's mind from the necessity of *expressed* sequence of imaginative thought. After describing all that is beautiful in the loving ways of his lady, the poet goes on to say—

“What sweeter than these things, except the thing  
In lacking which all these would lose their sweet :  
The confident heart's still fervour ; *the swift beat*  
*And soft subsidence of the spirit's wing,*  
*Then when it feels, in cloud-girt wayfaring,*  
*The breath of kindred plumes against its feet ?”*

The first three lines of this sestet still continue the direct description, but while the reader's mind is strictly within the groove of the concrete images of these and the forerunning octave, the mind of the author has pursued a relative conception, and at once expressed it as though in natural and unbroken sequence. It necessitates some effort on the part of the reader to realise at once, on having apprehended “the confident heart's still

fervour," the image of a human spirit, weary "in cloud-girt wayfaring," suddenly ceasing in solitary flight when it feels against its feet "the breath of kindred plumes" —in simpler terms, the sudden union of a soul that has remained in solitary expectancy till the twin-soul that was dearest to it on earth is suddenly released from its bodily environment. Both the idea and the lines expressing it are beautiful, yet the poet's absorption in his conception is so great that he forgets the reader's possible incapacity to keep mental pace with him without warning; and though the lines are not obscure, they are so worded that a vague uncertainty akin to the effect produced by obscurity is apt to be the result.

Detailed reference to each sonnet is at this stage impracticable, but silence as to the beauties of many unable to be mentioned is the more excusable when it is understood that there is a general excellence throughout, that every or nearly every sonnet is good, that a few are specially good, and that still fewer really altogether distance their companions. The series is indeed extraordinarily uniform in power, and it is almost impossible to open *The House of Life* at any page and not find something well worthy perusal. In *Winged Hours* the same note of foreboding, of anticipated sorrow, is struck as in the early *Lovesight*, but in *Mid-Rapture* there is a passionate feeling that seems to create a sufficiency of the present unto itself, a yielding to the intense love and comfort of one "lovely and beloved." *Soul Light* exhibits the genius of Rossetti in its spiritual aspect, the love of the spirit transcending the love of the body. In *Last Fire* there is another instance of the author's literary presentment of natural metaphors as well as of direct description of effects in

nature, literary in contradistinction to poetic—the lines, namely, beginning *This day at least*, etc. ; but *Her Gifts* is a beautiful sonnet from first to last, one of the most beautiful, indeed, in the series of those that deal with love. *The Dark Glass* is a noble sonnet, and I shall quote the octave as an example of the sonorous music Rossetti could draw from these artificially arranged decasyllabic lines :—

“Not I myself know all my love for thee :  
How should I reach so far, who cannot weigh  
To-morrow's dower by gauge of yesterday ?  
Shall birth and death, and all dark names that be,  
As doors and windows bared to some loud sea,  
Lash deaf mine ears and blind my face with spray ;  
And shall my sense pierce love,—the last relay  
And ultimate outpost of eternity ?”

*Sleepless Dreams* has a special pathos when we know how truly it is applicable to the poet's own bitter experiences—

“O lonely night ! art thou not known to me,  
A thicket hung with masks of mockery,  
And watered with the wasteful warmth of tears.”

Many noble sonnets immediately follow, *Severed Selves, Through Death to Love*, wherein—

“ . . . within some glass dimmed by our breath,  
Our hearts discern wild images of Death,  
Shadows and shoals that edge eternity ;”

the terribly pathetic *Cloud and Wind* (why so called it is not easy to understand), *Secret Parting, Parted Love*, and the exquisite *Broken Music*. The four entitled *Willowwood* are full of symbolism and beauty, while, from a technical point of view, the octave of the third

is interesting from being the only irregular octave amongst all the author's sonnets, not indeed irregular in having more than two rhyme-sounds, but in the second and third and sixth and seventh lines having different instead of sympathetic terminals. It may also be noted that the first and fifth rhyme-sounds nearly constitute what is called a proper rhyme, "willowwood" and "wooded," for though the former has a sharper accentuation, they are practically the same, especially as their corresponding rhymes are "hood" and "food;" and again, in the twelfth line there is an unusual triple assonance, "*Steep deep the soul in sleep till she were dead.*" Amongst the remaining sonnets of the first part of *The House of Life* are the subtle and beautiful *Still-born Love*, the noble three on *True Woman*, and *Without Her*, the last of which I shall quote, both for its own great beauty and because it gives the key-note of the whole, the loss that succeeds youth and is the heart of change. Henceforth there will be less passion, but deeper regret, deeper despondency, deeper despair and a wearied resignation, and with fewer occasional interludes. The sonnet in question was no mere result of poetic emotion but was the outcome of the poet's own most bitter personal sorrow, and it has hence an added significance and pathos.

WITHOUT HER.

What of the glass without her? The blank gray  
There where the pool is blind of the moon's face.  
Her dress without her? The tossed empty space  
Of cloud-rack whence the moon has passed away.  
Her paths without her? Day's appointed sway  
Usurped by desolate night. Her pillowed place  
Without her? Tears, ah me! for love's good grace,  
And cold forgetfulness of night or day.

What of the heart without her ? Nay, poor heart,  
Of thee what word remains ere speech be still ?  
A wayfarer by barren ways and chill,  
Steep ways and weary, without her thou art,  
Where the long cloud, the long wood's counterpart  
Sheds doubled darkness up the labouring hill.

The first two sonnets of the second part (*Change and Fate*) deal with the poetic personality ; but in the third, *The Soul's Sphere*, the questioning spirit of doubt again finds expression, while *Inclusiveness* has a specially subtle treatment. The sonnet called *Ardour and Memory* follows the latter, and is that of which a facsimile from the original is given opposite this page : it was written in December 1880, and takes a beautiful illustration from nature to express the "after-glow" that memory inherits from youthful ardour—that of the rose-tree leaves turning red in late autumn as with remembered crimson. On the other hand, the sestet is very involved, the last line reading either as a new sentence or as sequent to the twelfth and thirteenth lines, in either case without sense ; the meaning, of course, is that, when "flown all joys," though through wintry forest-boughs—

"The wind swoops onward brandishing the light,  
With ditties and with dirges infinite,—  
Even yet the rose-trees' verdure left alone  
Will flush all ruddy though the rose be gone."

*Known in Vain*, *The Heart of the Night*, *The Landmark*, and *A Dark Day*, are all specially noble sonnets, full of the stern sadness that seems fitting to a poet bearing the name of him who had seen the issues of life, and "who had been in hell." *Autumn Idleness* is perhaps on the whole the most flawless of all Rossetti's "natural" poems, perfect from the first line to







the last ; and in *The Hill Summit* there is noble usage of the imagery of sunset, though the opening metaphors are somewhat obscure and involved. The three called *The Choice*, beginning separately, *Eat thou and drink, Watch thou and fear, Think thou and act*, have a width of application, an impersonality of utterance not characteristic of the greater number of the author's sonnets in *The House of Life* ; especially noteworthy are the bitter lines closing the first, and the beautiful sestet of the third which gives a greater idea of immeasurable distance than any other passage I can recollect :—

“Nay, come up hither. From this wave-washed mound  
Unto the furthest flood-brim look with me ;  
Then reach on with thy thought till it be drown'd.  
Miles and miles distant though the last line be,  
And though thy soul sail leagues and leagues beyond,  
Still, leagues beyond those leagues, there is more sea.”

Under the heading of *Old and New Art*, a sonnet, formerly printed amongst those for Pictures and called *St. Luke the Painter*, appears as No. LXXIV. in *The House of Life*, followed by two under the same general title, though not equalling the first ; and these are followed by *Soul's Beauty* and *Body's Beauty*, which are respectively those written for Rossetti's splendid paintings *Sibylla Palmifera* and *Lady Lilith*, and which have already been referred to and used in illustration of the latter.<sup>1</sup> No. LXXIX., *The Monochord*, is the sonnet that concluded Rossetti's first volume when it began with, *Is it the moved air or the moving sound*, and purported to be “written during music,” and was interpretive of those vague thoughts that dominate

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* pp. 201 and 209 *ante*.

the mind during the strange, indefinite, and yearning expressiveness of such melodies and harmonies as we associate with the names of Beethoven, Handel, Mozart, Schumann, Chopin, and others. It now begins, *Is it this sky's vast vault or ocean's sound*, an alteration that *may* have greater significance, but I confess to me has not, or rather has not in relation to what follows. It was in its fitting place when standing detached from aught else, but instead of being a link in the chain of the hundred-and-one sonnets making *The House of Life* it seems to me to be a break in the sequence. Of the five following, two are specially fine, *Memorial Thresholds*, with the terrible suggestiveness of its closing lines,—

“Or mocking winds whirl round a chaff-strown floor,  
Thee and thy years and these my words and me”—

and *Barren Spring*, which I shall quote as the most beautiful record amongst Rossetti's poems of that deep despondency that at times laid such a heavy hand upon his life, turning friendship into emptiness, hope into bitterness, and the loveliest things of nature into premonitions of decay and death:—

#### BARREN SPRING.

Once more the changed year's turning wheel returns :  
And as a girl sails balanced in the wind,  
And now before and now again behind  
Stoops as it swoops, with cheek that laughs and burns,—  
So spring comes merry towards me here, but earns  
No answering smile from me, whose life is twin'd  
With the dead boughs that winter still must bind,  
And whom to-day the spring no more concerns.

Behold, this crocus is a withering flame ;  
This snowdrop, snow ; this apple-blossom's part  
To breed the fruit that breeds the serpent's art. .  
Nay, for these spring-flowers, turn thy face from them,  
Nor stay till on the year's last lily stem  
The white cup shrivels round the golden heart.

The pathetic eighty-fourth sonnet was, like *Autumn Idleness*, composed at Penkill Castle in 1869. It was written on the 27th of September, and Rossetti left next day, never again to revisit the place where in 1868 the rebirth of his poetic powers had gradually taken place. Than *Vain Virtues* and *Lost Days* there are no more terrible and impressive sonnets in our language. In the latter the closing octave-lines that previously ran—

" Or such spilt water as in dreams must cheat  
The throats of men in hell athirst alway ; "

now read—

" Or such spilt water as in dreams must cheat  
The undying throats of hell, athirst alway ; "

and the alteration was made on account of the *in* about midway in either line ; but though the two *in*'s do monotonise the modulation, the substituted reading contains a tautological flaw in the use of *undying* and *alway*, which imply each other. *Retro me, Sathana* is a noble sonnet of the Miltonic kind, opening with magnificent imagery, and powerful also is *Lost on both Sides*, though the culminating metaphor is too laboured ; while in *The Sun's Shame* (I.) we have one of the most marked examples of the direct influence of Shakespeare's sonnets upon the author of *The House of Life*. There is an especial one of the former having

a strict resemblance to *The Sun's Shame* in all but the two closing lines,—namely, the sixty-sixth, beginning *Tir'd with all these, for restful Death I cry*, both bringing the same bitter charge against life, of evil and wrong everywhere in the ascendant; but although the sentiment of Rossetti's two last lines is more nobly consistent with the scornful antecedent passages than the couplet of Shakespeare's sonnet, its metaphor is too laboured, has too much of Elizabethan affectation, to read so naturally. No. XCVII. is very impressive:—

“Look in my face ; my name is Might-have-been ;  
I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell ;

. . . . .  
. . . . .

“Mark me, how still I am ! But should there dart  
One moment through thy soul the soft surprise  
Of that winged Peace which lulls the breath of sighs,  
Then shalt thou see me smile, and turn apart  
Thy visage to mine ambush at thy heart  
Sleepless with cold commemorative eyes.”

The two sonnets called *New Born Death* have that flawless beauty which must outstand the stress of time, the perfect workmanship with the clear poetic vision of a truly great imaginative mind. The essential spirit of the ideal personalities mentioned is divined and embodied afresh with new loveliness, and we behold Death as a young child, Life its mother as a beautiful woman and the mother of Love that has passed away; of Song, whose hair “blew like a flame, and blossomed like a wreath,” and of Art, “whose eyes were worlds by God found fair,” and of these the poet asks Life—

“And did these die that thou might'st bear me Death ?”

With the succeeding sonnet, *The One Hope*, the Sequence comes to a close, not in passionate clinging to life or love, not in high resolve or winged aspiration, or, on the other hand, not in absolute despair, but with a sad and resigned Hope.

"When vain desire at last and vain regret  
Go hand in hand to death, and all is vain,  
What shall assuage the unforgotten pain  
And teach the unforgetful to forget.

"Ah! when the wan soul in that golden air  
Between the scripted petals softly blown  
Peers breathless for the gift of grace unknown—  
Ah! let none other alien spell soe'er  
But only the one Hope's one name be there,—  
Not less nor more, but even that word alone."

Thus ends the famous Sonnet-Sequence of the greatest sonnet writer of our period, the record of a strange and fascinating nature and the outpouring of a dual life that will surely have an interest and delight for posterity as long as posterity cherishes the sonnets of Shakespeare, of Milton, of Mrs. Browning, and of Wordsworth.

With *The House of Life* comes to an end this record of the lifework in two arts of one of the central figures of our age—a man whose far-reaching personal influence it is not easy to measure, whose poetic work has added new richness to our noblest literature, and whose devotion to and pursuit of a high ideal in art has resulted in paintings whose splendour and depth of colour have inaugurated a new era, while they have recalled a past glory such as the noblest of the Venetian school alone possessed in like

degree. In art we are not likely to have another Turner, though we may yet have other great painters ; in poetry we shall not have another record like the *Portuguese Sonnets*, though we may have other greater sonnet writers than the author of these ; and in like manner neither we nor the generations who come after us, whether we or they see greater or lesser artists, greater or lesser poets, will see another Dante Gabriel Rossetti.



